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Clasquin et al.

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(54) **TIRE CHANGING MACHINE WITH FORCE
DETECTION AND CONTROL METHODS**

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- (*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
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(22) Filed: **Mar. 13, 2013**

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filed on Jul. 16, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,613,303.
- (60) Provisional application No. 61/081,454, filed on Jul.
17, 2008.

Primary Examiner — Hadi Shakeri

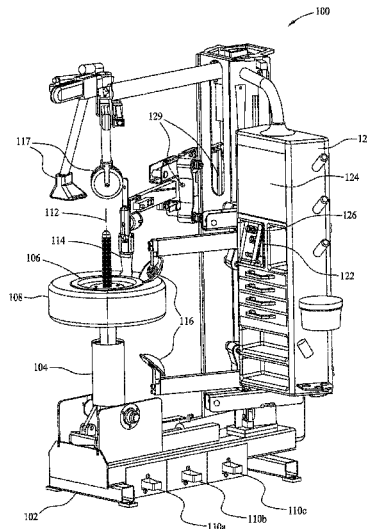
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B60C 25/05 (2006.01)
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- (52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **B60C 25/0515** (2013.04); **B60C 25/0548**
(2013.04); **B60C 25/138** (2013.01)
- (58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC B60C 25/05; B60C 25/138; B60C 25/056;
B60C 25/135; B60C 25/0527; B60C 25/0551;
B60C 25/0554; B60C 25/0515; B60C 25/0548
USPC 157/1, 1.17, 1.34, 1.26, 1.28
See application file for complete search history.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Tire changing machines including force and position sensors facilitating automated detection of wheel rim and tire features by a controller. Dimensional and location information for features of interest may be detected and recorded for use by the controller to perform tire change procedures. Positioning error and malfunctioning machine components, including feedback sensors, may also be detected in an automated manner.

28 Claims, 20 Drawing Sheets



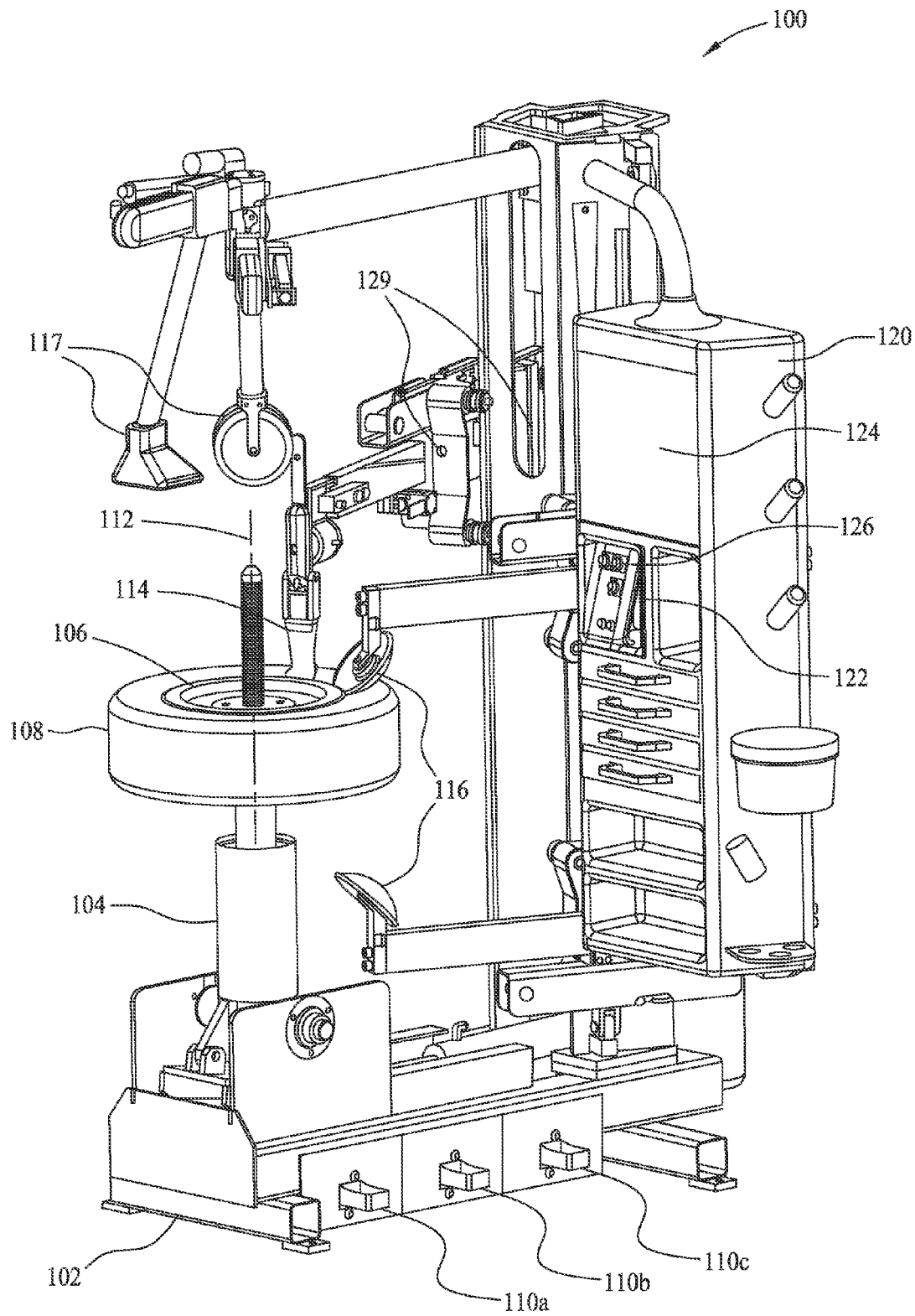


FIG. 1a

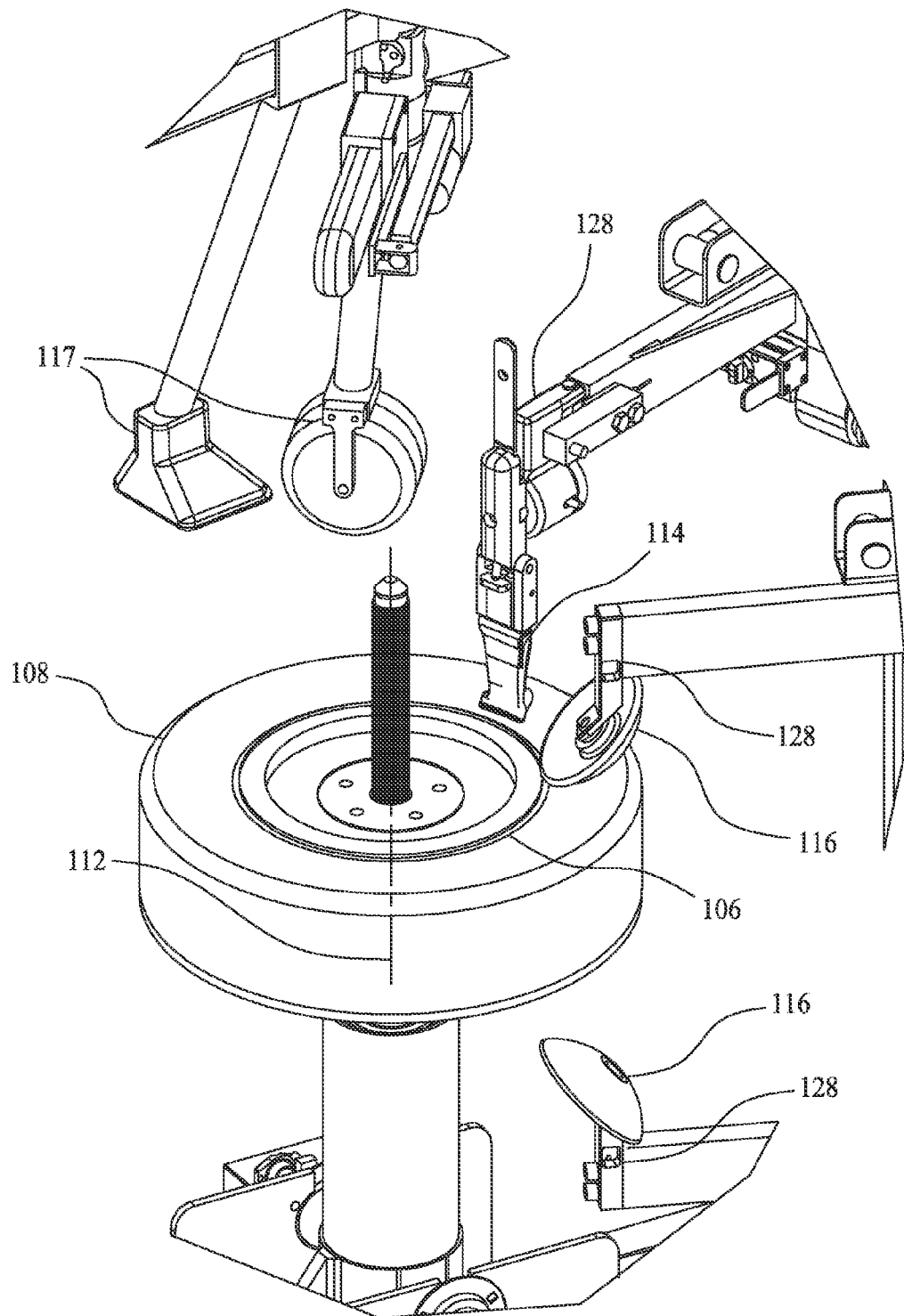


FIG. 1b

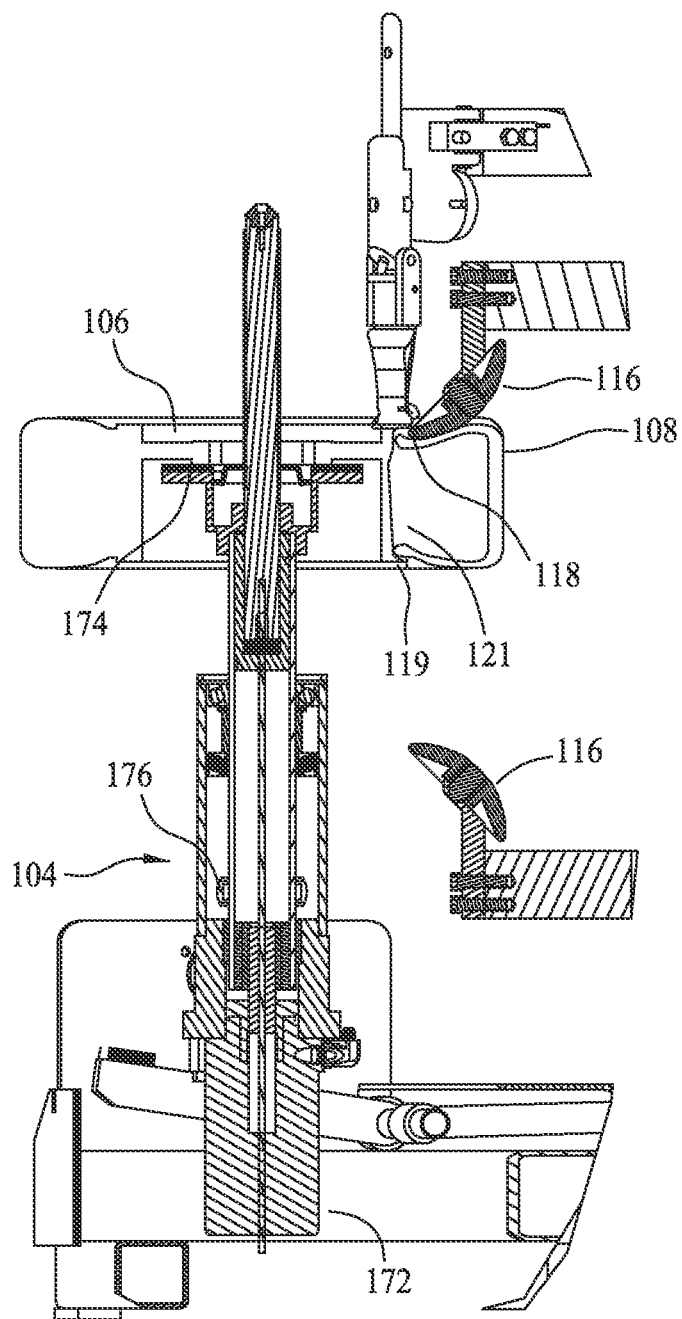


FIG. 1c

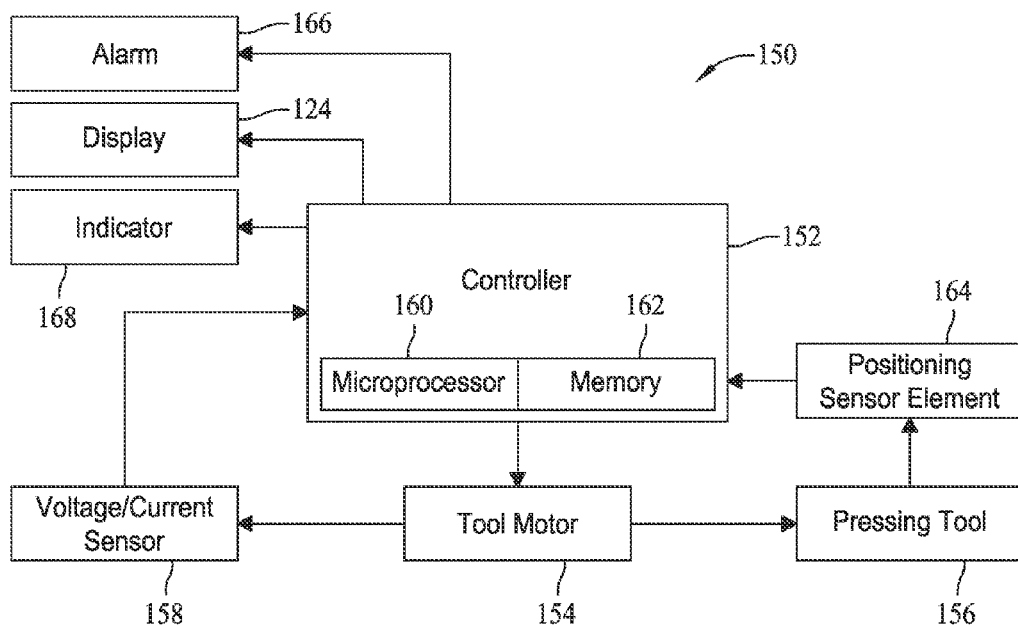


FIG. 2

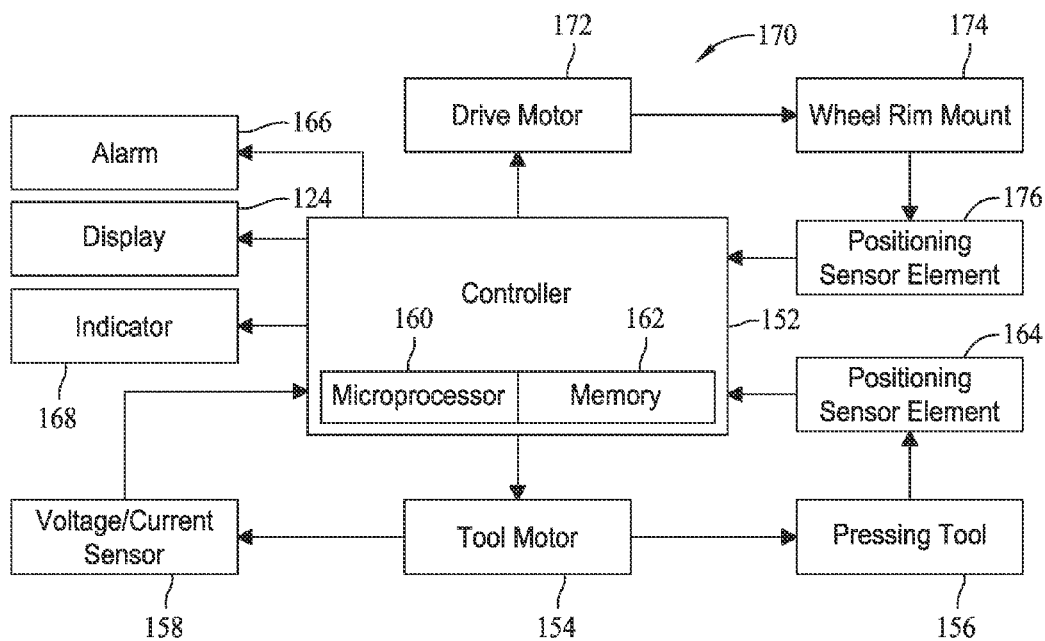


FIG. 3

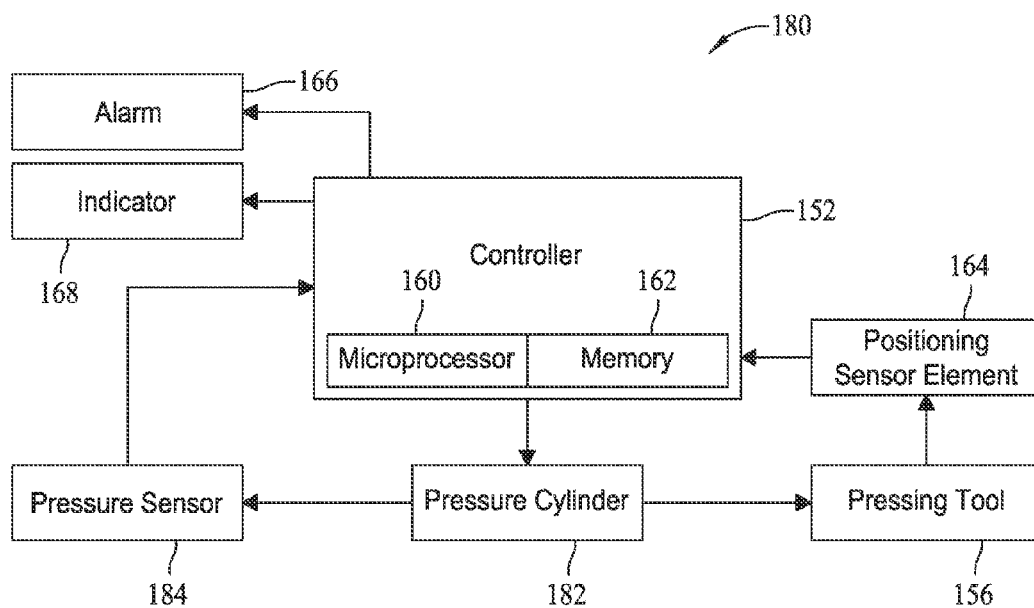


FIG. 4

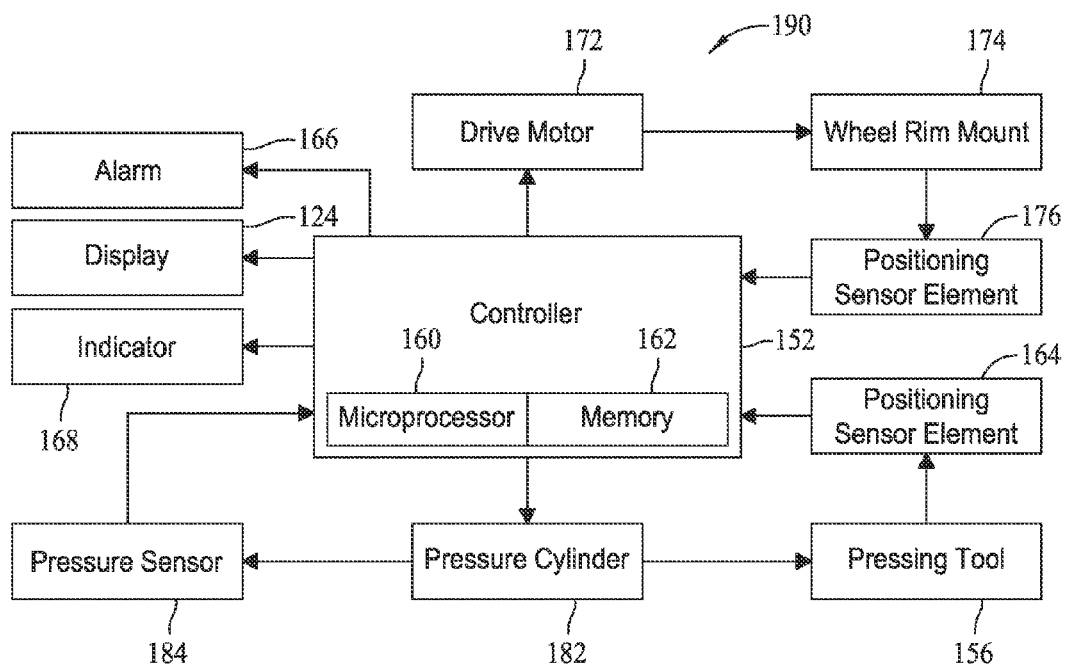


FIG. 5

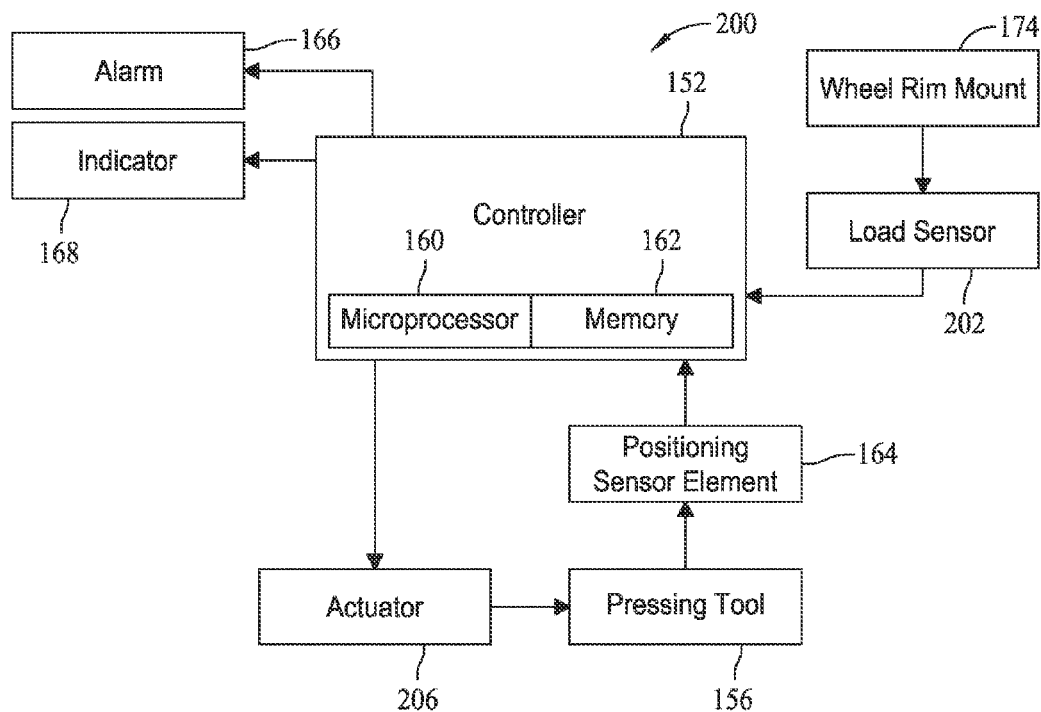


FIG. 6

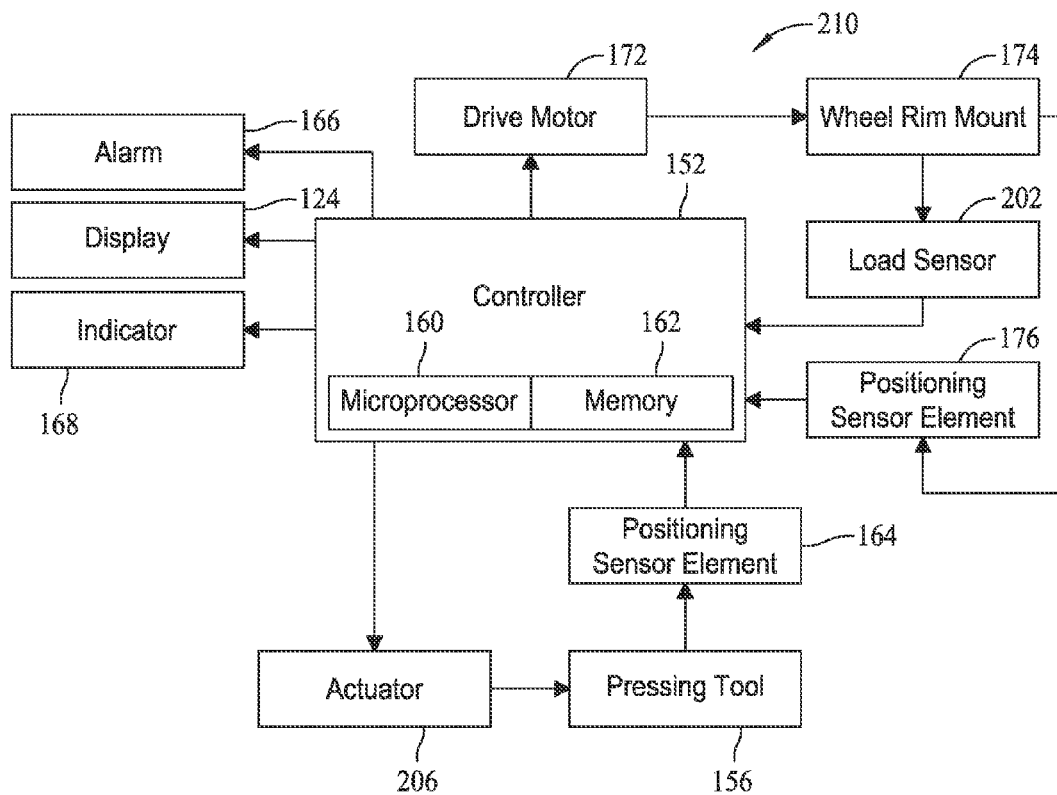


FIG. 7

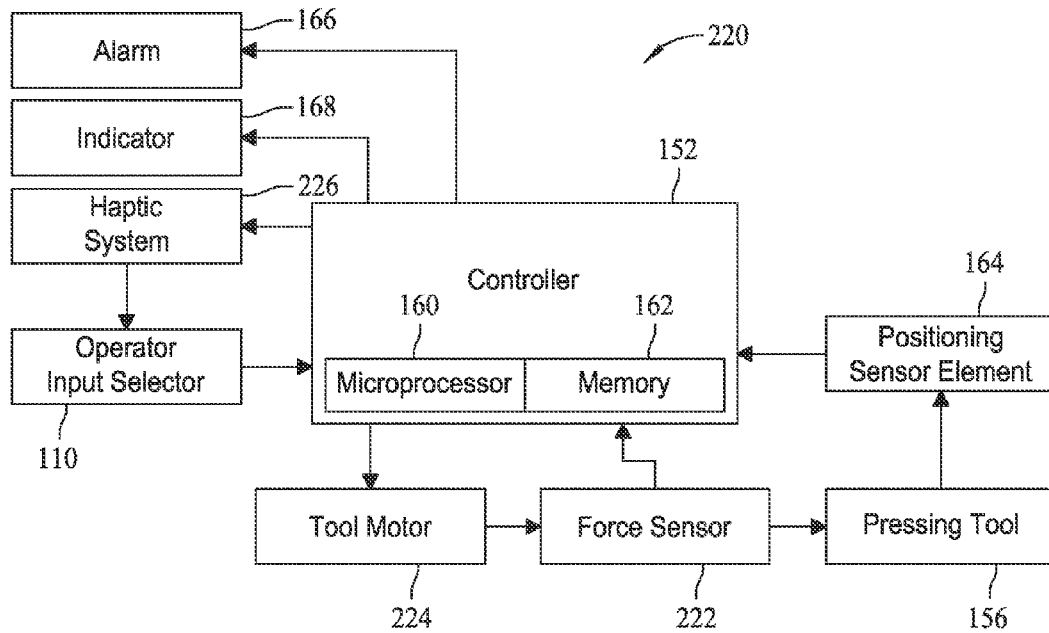


FIG. 8

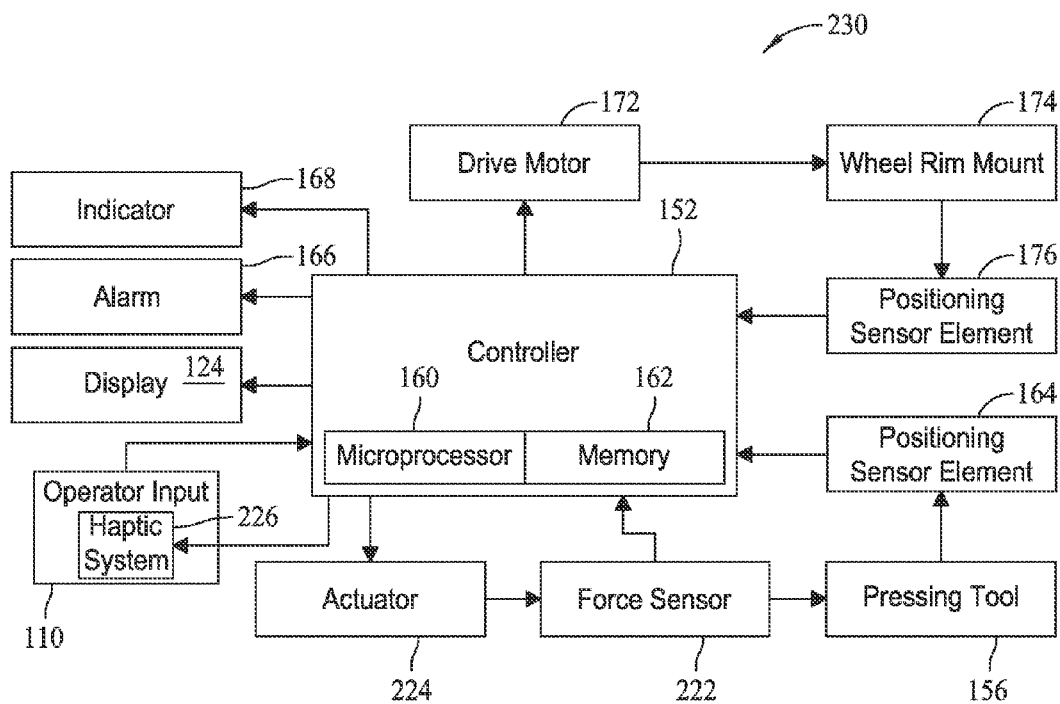


FIG. 9

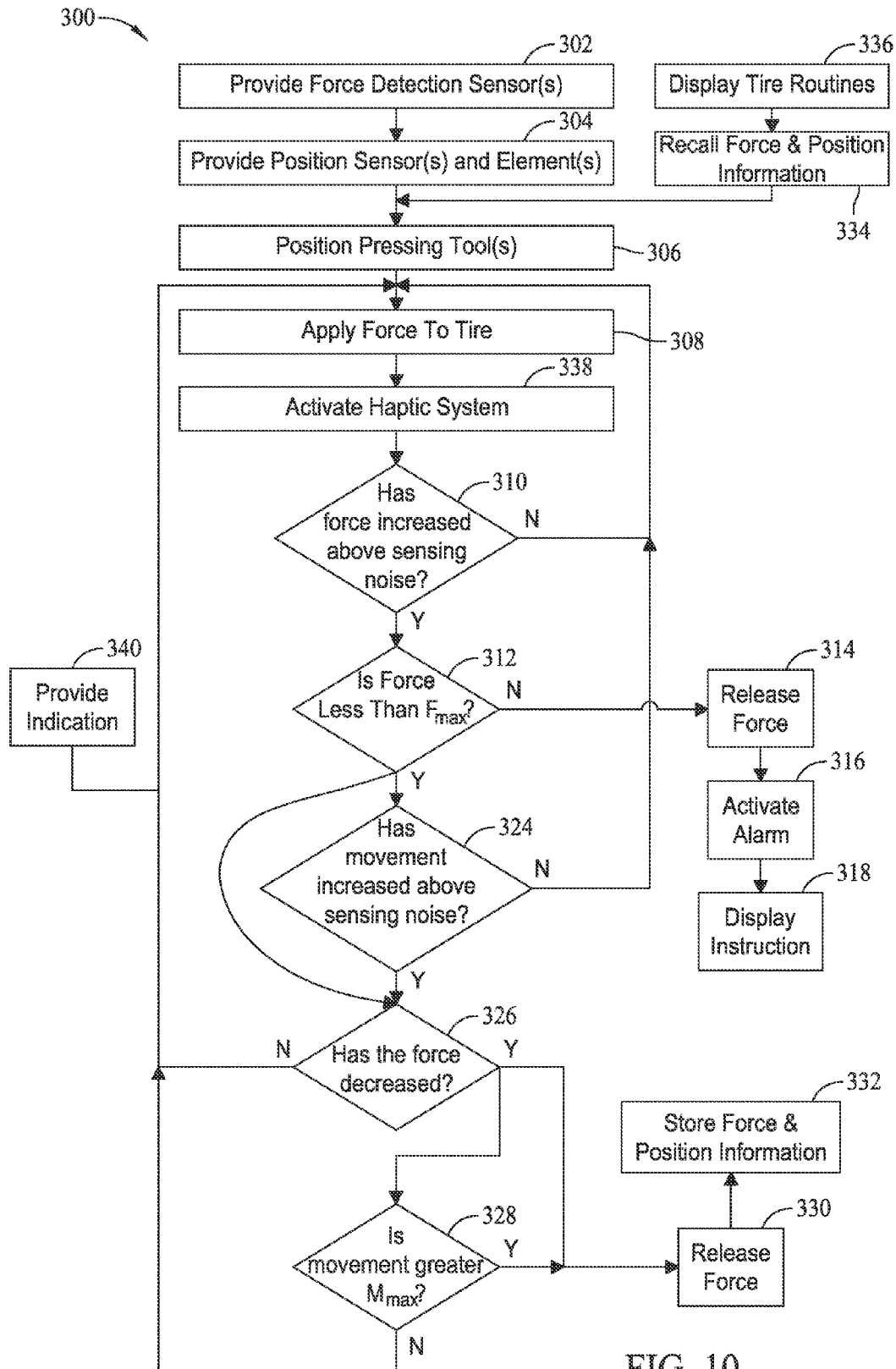


FIG. 10

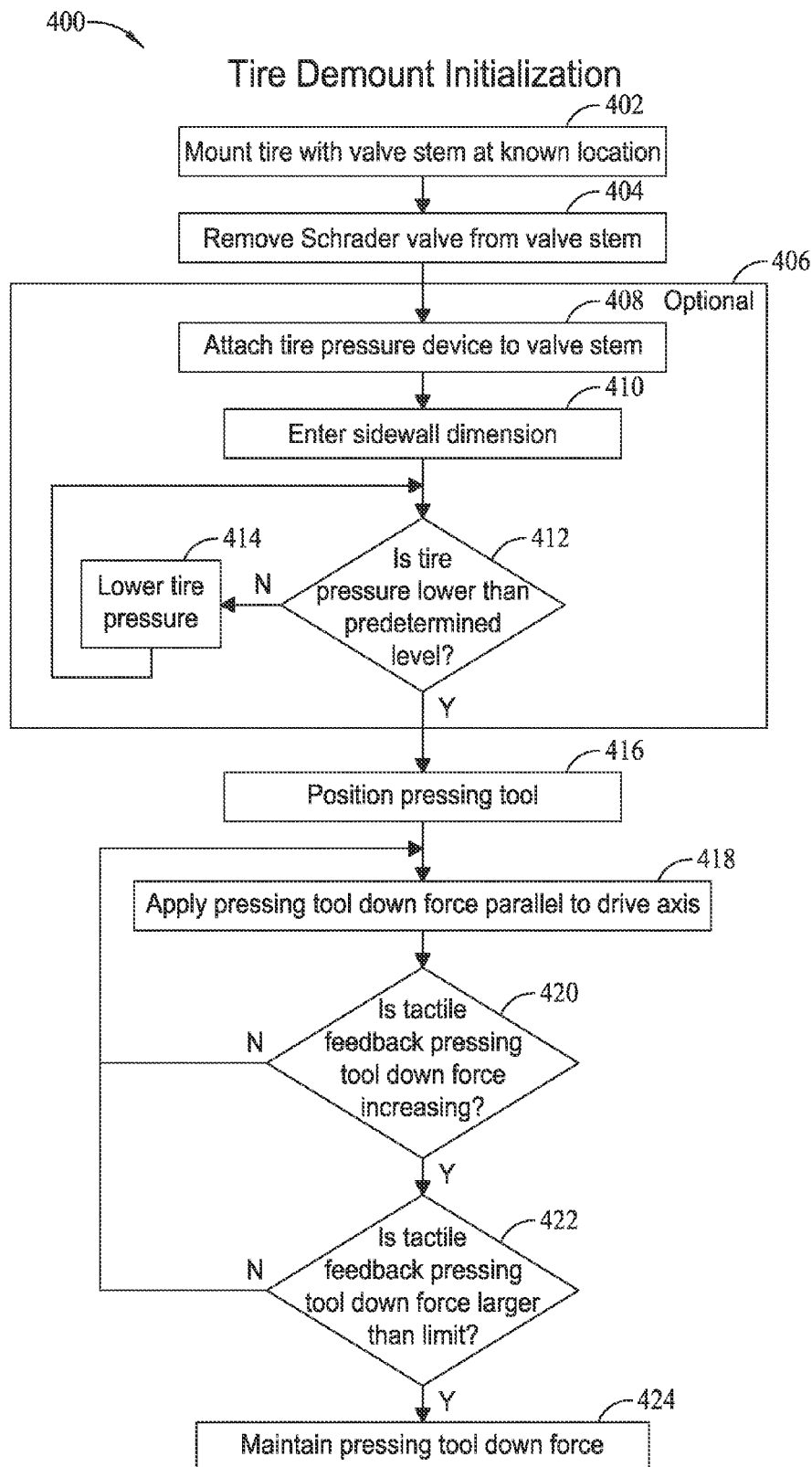


FIG. 11

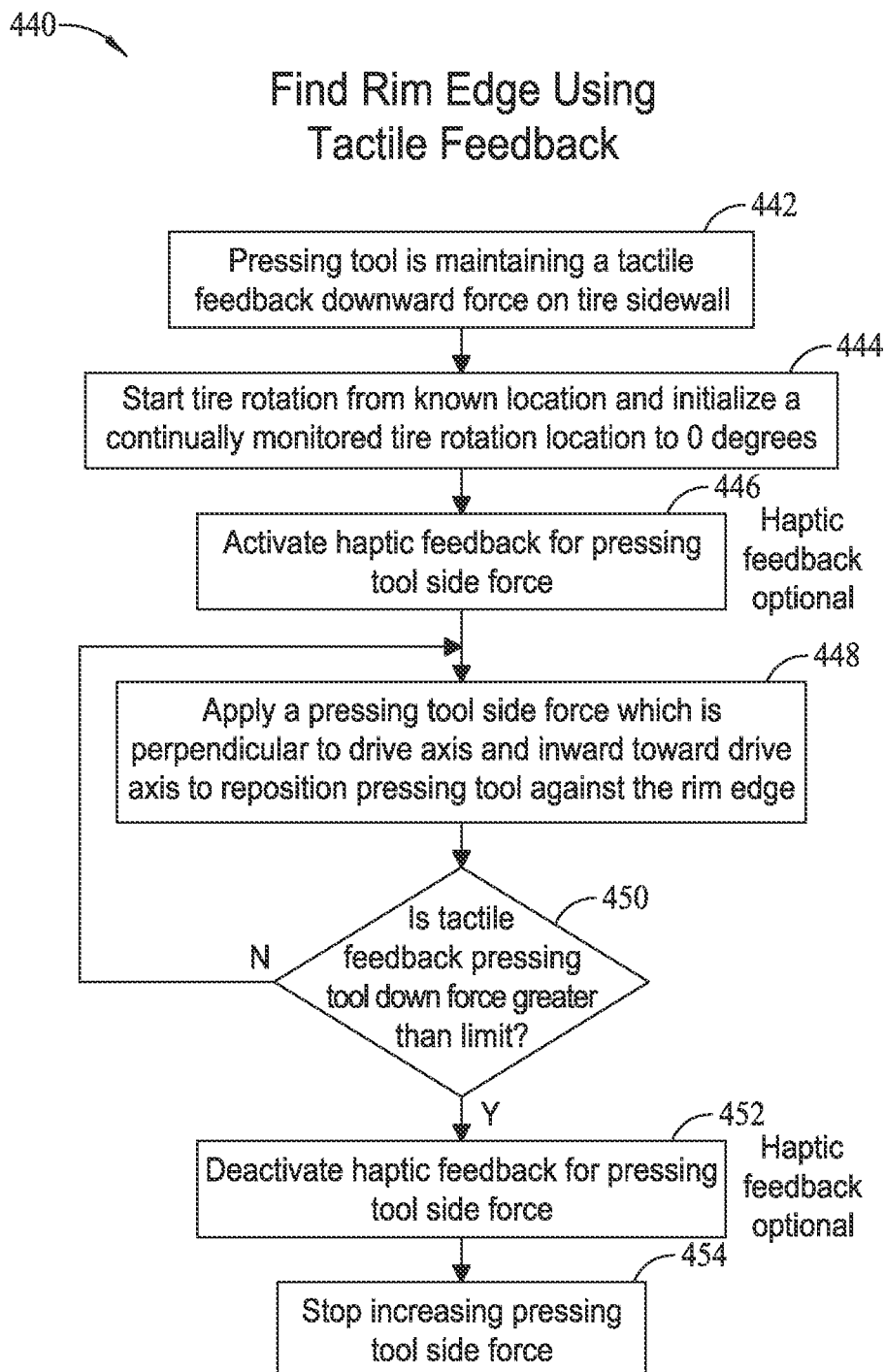
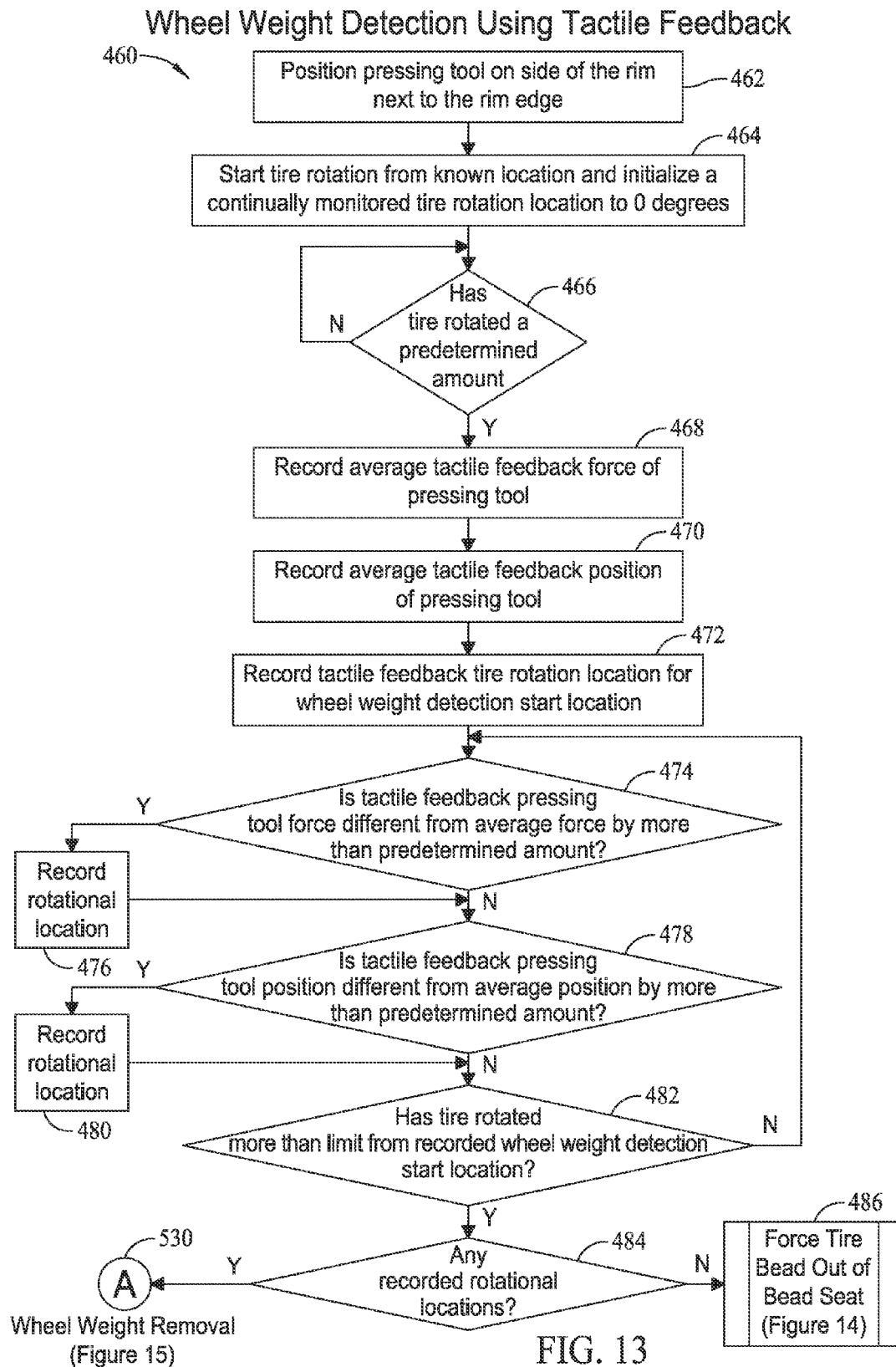
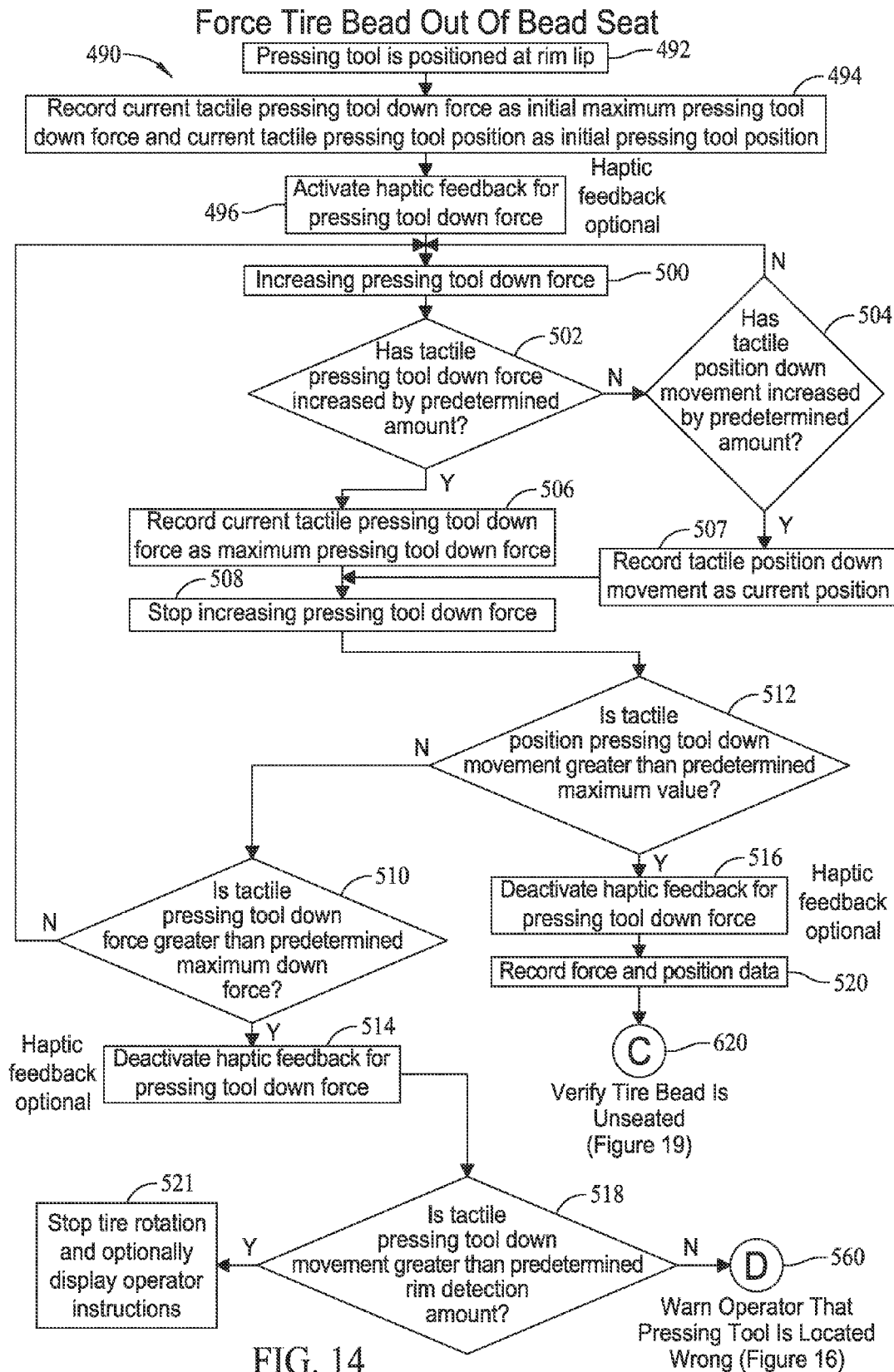


FIG. 12





Wheel Weight Removal

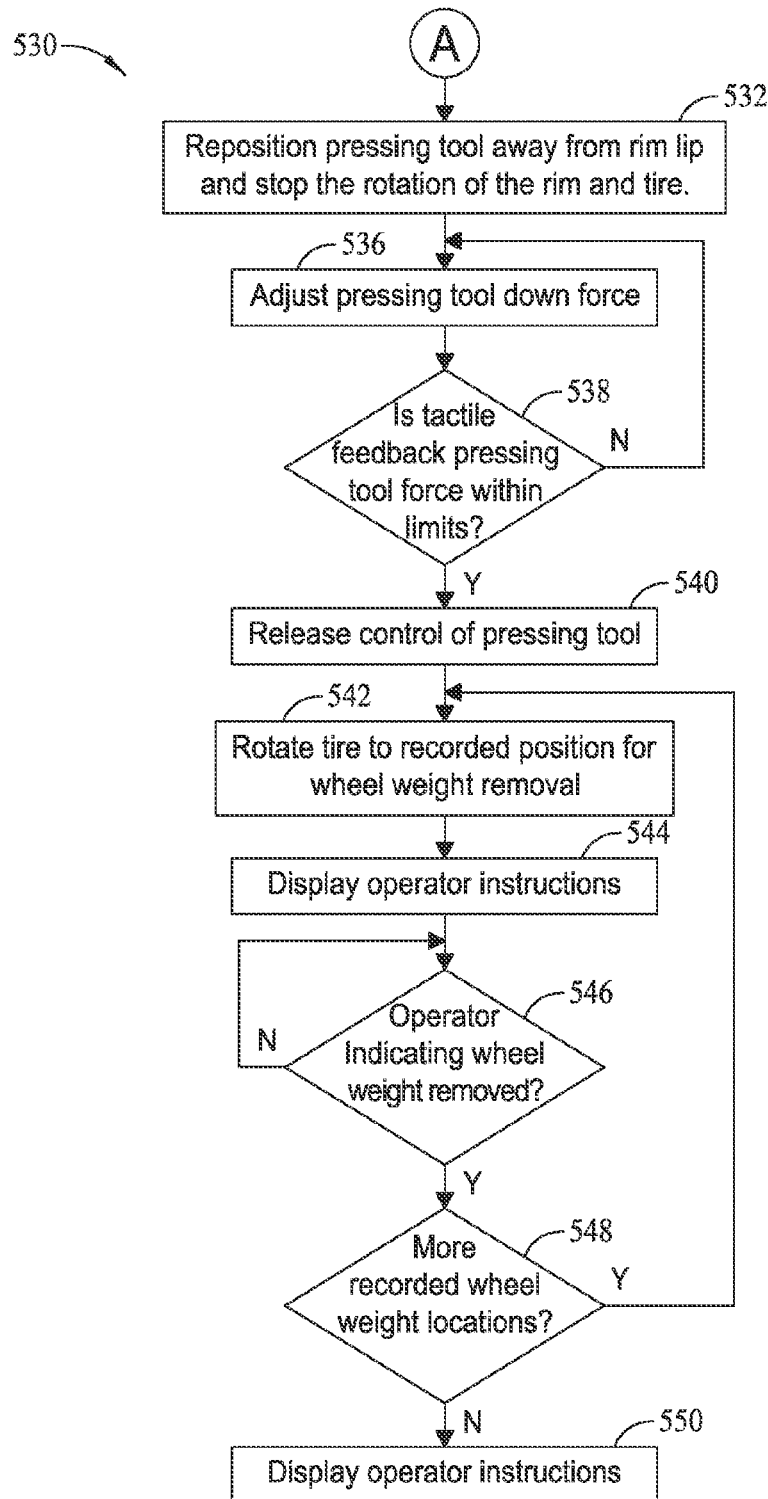


FIG. 15

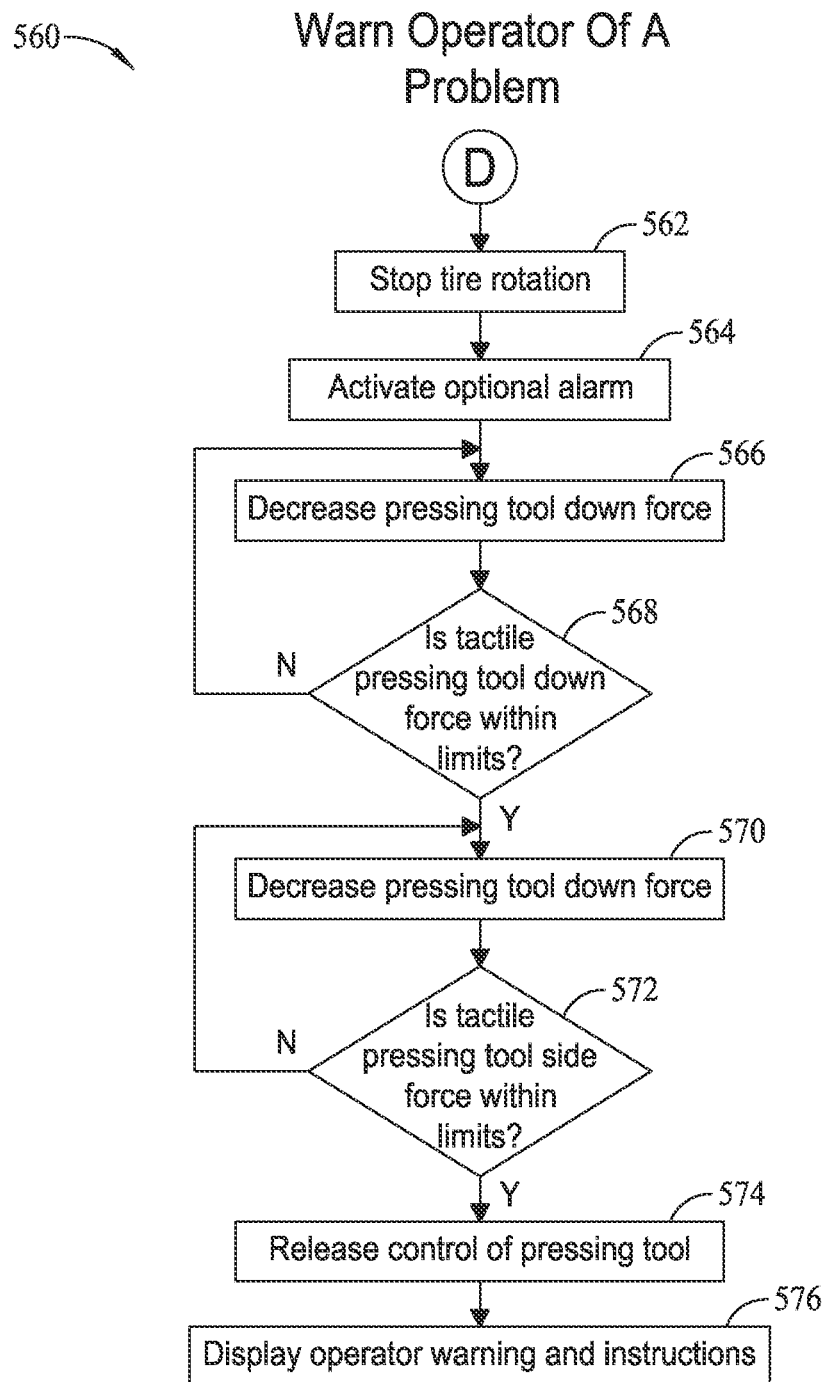


FIG. 16

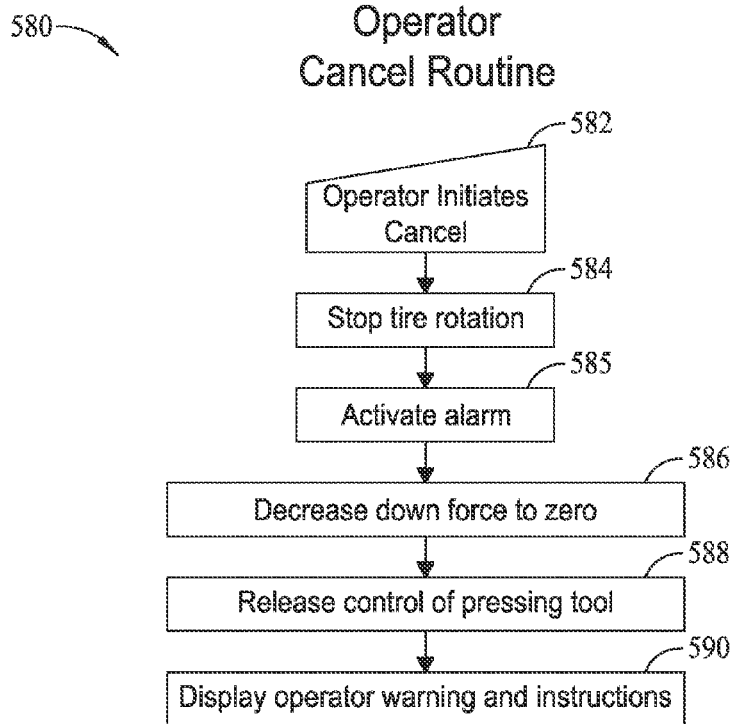


FIG. 17

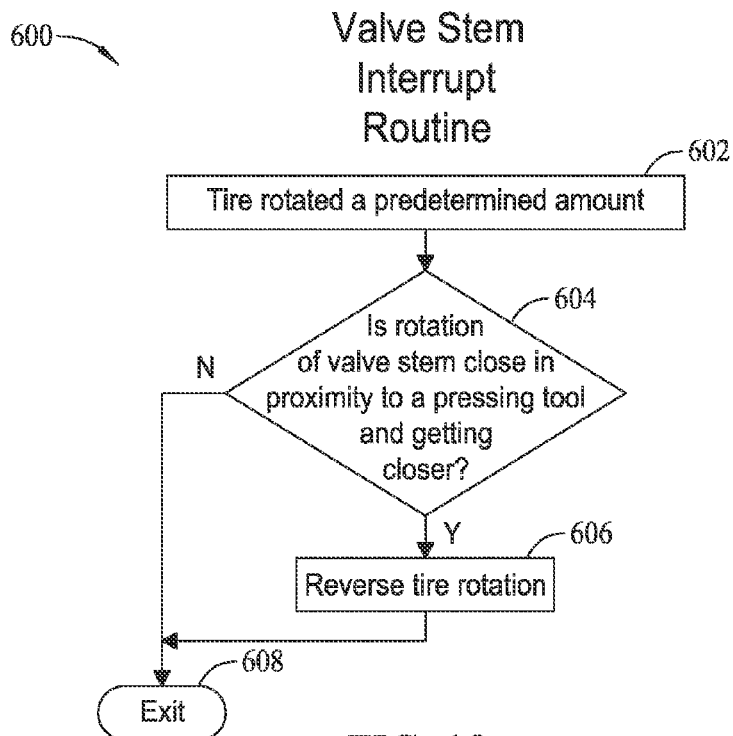


FIG. 18

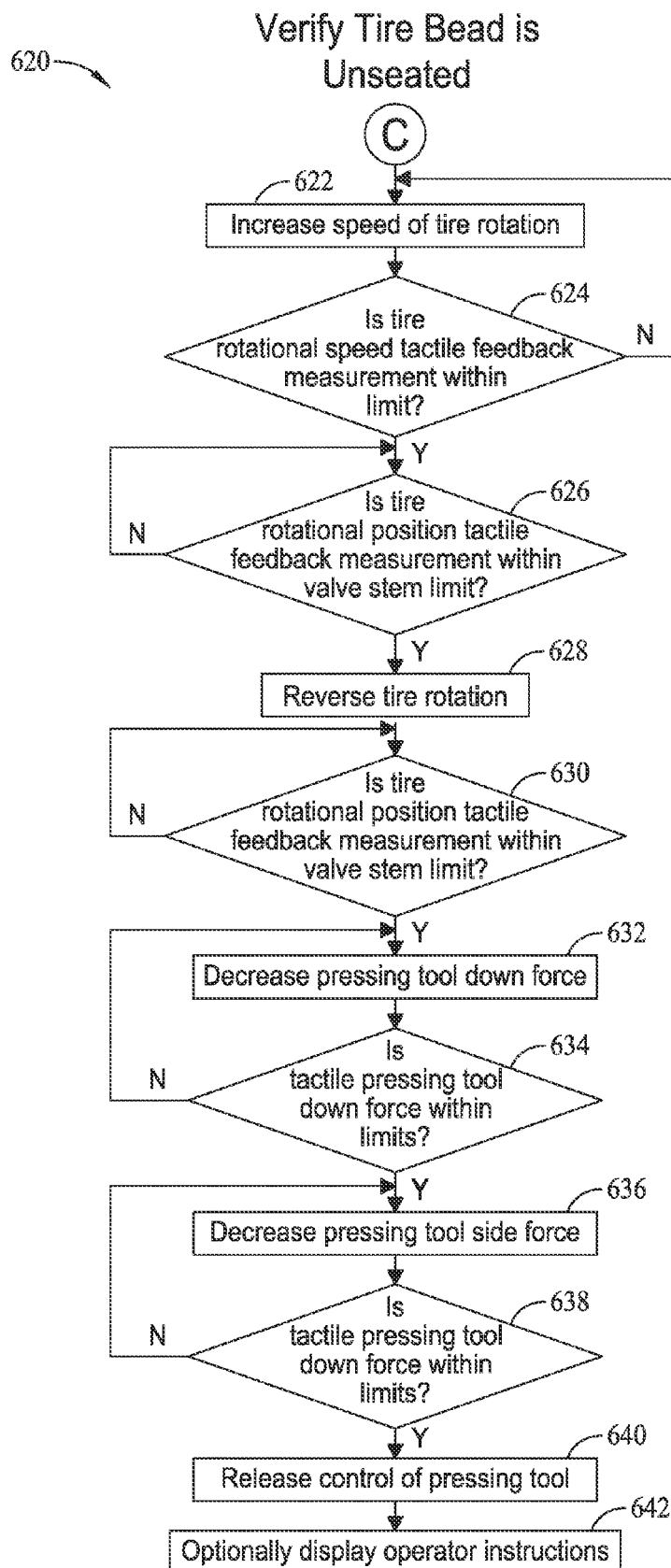


FIG. 19

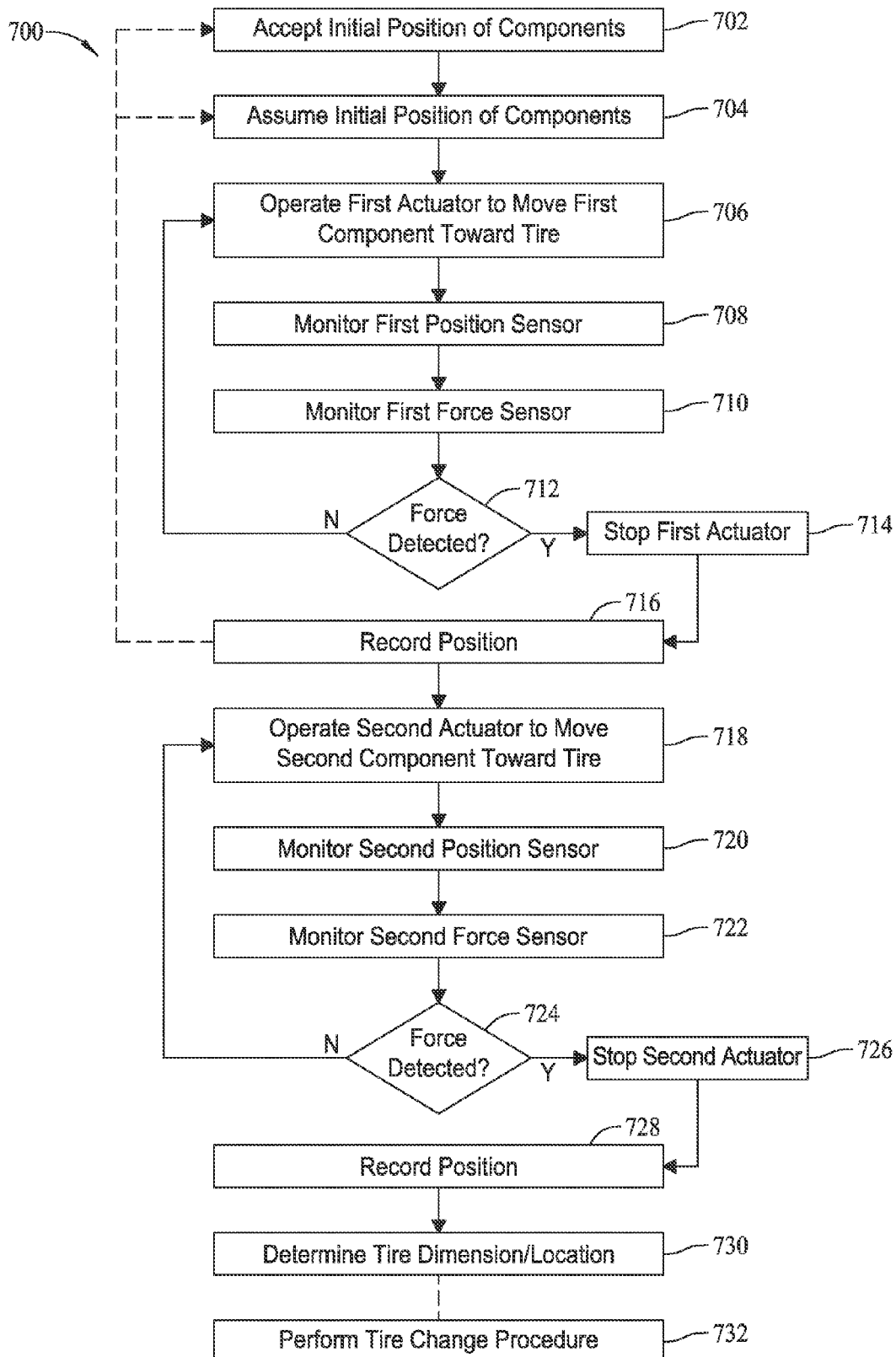


FIG. 20

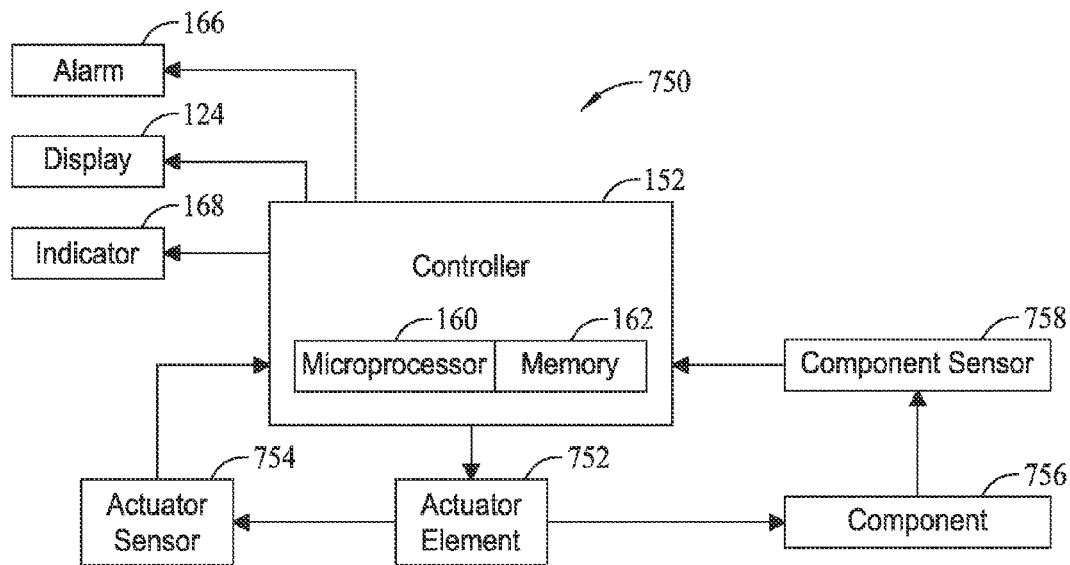


FIG. 21

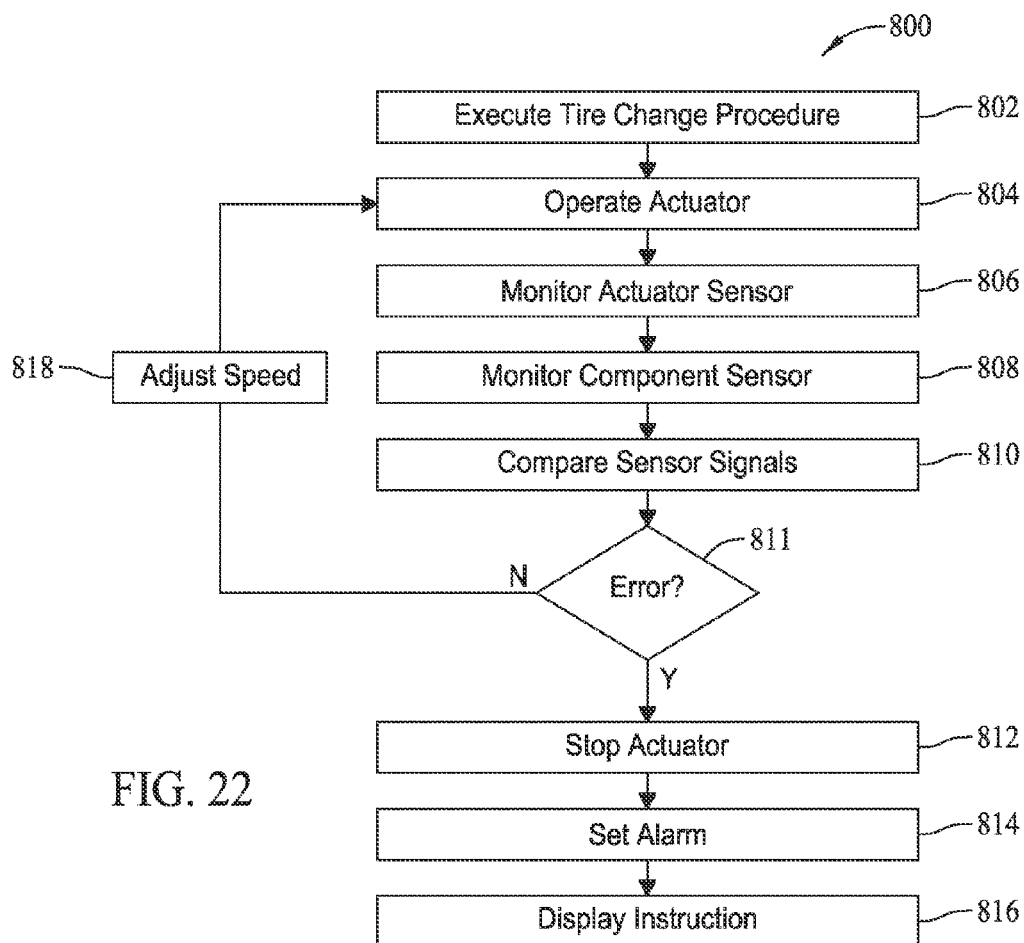


FIG. 22

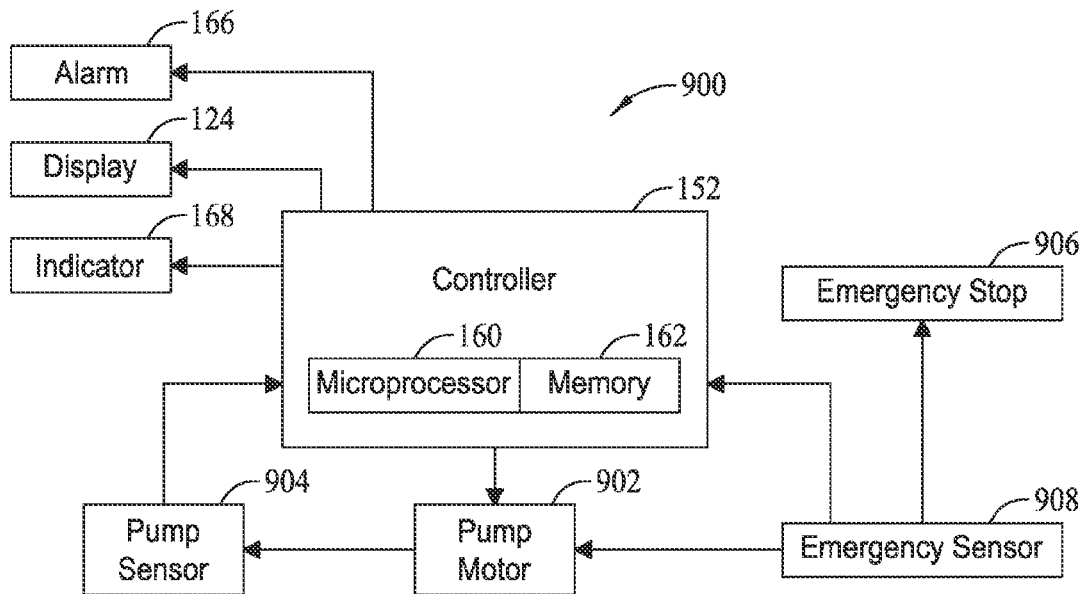


FIG. 23

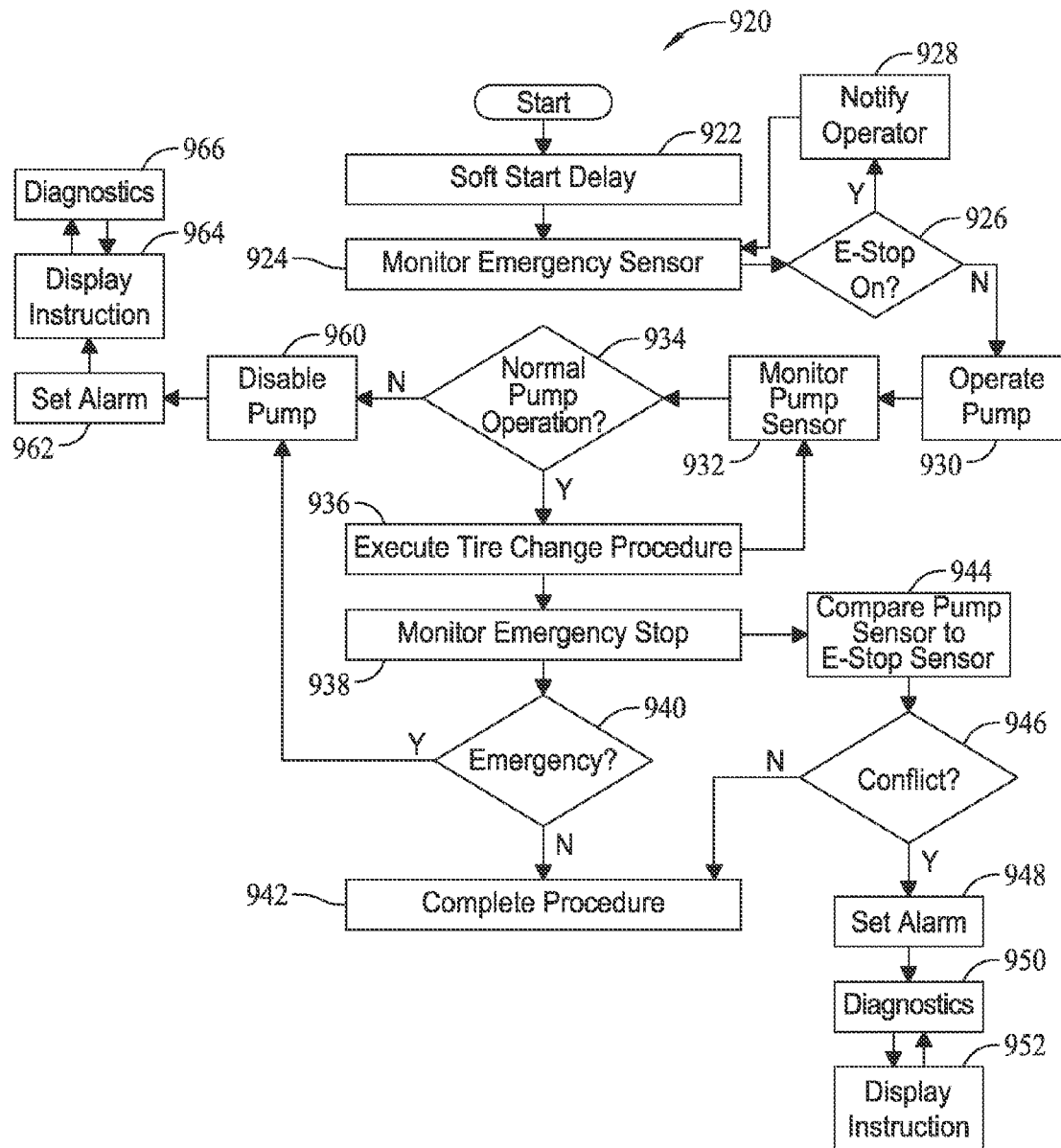


FIG. 24

TIRE CHANGING MACHINE WITH FORCE DETECTION AND CONTROL METHODS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation in part application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/504,217 filed Jul. 16, 2009 and entitled "Tire Changing Machine with Force Detection and Control Methods", now issued U.S. Pat. No. 8,613,303, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/081,454 filed Jul. 17, 2008, the complete disclosures of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The field of the invention relates generally to machines for changing a tire on a wheel rim, and more specifically to tire changing machines having force detection, position detection and control capability.

The process of removing a tire from a wheel rim and replacing it with another tire, referred to herein as tire changing, can be difficult. In response to such difficulties, machines have been developed to facilitate the tire changing process. Manual or machine implemented tools are also utilized to press the tire onto the wheel rim for installation. While known machines have obtained some level of success in reducing the time and labor associated with changing a tire, there remains room for improvement.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Non-limiting and non-exhaustive embodiments are described with reference to the following Figures, wherein like reference numerals refer to like parts throughout the various views unless otherwise specified.

FIGS. 1a, 1b and 1c are respective views of an exemplary embodiment of a tire changing machine in a perspective view, a magnified view, and a sectional view.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a first exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of a second exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a third exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of a fourth exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a fifth exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram of a sixth exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram of a seventh exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 9 is a block diagram of an eighth exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 10 is a method flowchart of an exemplary process of operating the machine in exemplary tire change procedures.

FIG. 11 illustrates a tire demount initialization routine.

FIG. 12 illustrates a rim edge location routine.

FIG. 13 illustrates a wheel weight detection routine.

FIG. 14 illustrates a bead breaking routine.

FIG. 15 illustrates a wheel weight removal routine.

FIG. 16 illustrates an operator warning routine.

FIG. 17 illustrates an operator cancel routine.

FIG. 18 illustrates a valve stem interrupt routine.

FIG. 19 illustrates tire bead unseat verification routine.

FIG. 20 illustrates another exemplary tire demount initialization routine.

FIG. 21 is a block diagram of a ninth exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 22 is a method flowchart of an exemplary process of operating the machine in exemplary tire change procedures.

FIG. 23 is a block diagram of a tenth exemplary control system for the machine shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 24 is a method flowchart of an exemplary process of operating the machine in exemplary tire change procedures.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Exemplary embodiments of tire changing machines and methods are described in detail below. The tire changing machines and methods facilitate efficient tire changing with reduced difficulty for machine operators and with improved control features. Information may be provided to machine operators concerning successful operation of the machine. Corrective action and instructions may be provided to avoid inadvertent damage to the wheel rim, damage to the machine itself, and/or potentially hazardous operating conditions during tire changing processes.

FIGS. 1a, 1b and 1c illustrate an exemplary tire changing machine 100 including a frame or base 102 and a rotatable drive shaft assembly 104 attached to the base 102. The drive shaft assembly 104 may include a post or shaft positioned centrally on the base 102, and the shaft is adapted to receive and retain a wheel rim 106 having a tire 108 at a mounting station 105. The wheel rim 106 may be secured to the drive shaft assembly 104 with a known clamping mechanism after the wheel rim 106 and tire 108 is loaded and mounted onto the machine 100. After the wheel rim 106 is clamped in position, a machine operator manipulates an input selector 110a which operates the drive shaft assembly 104 to rotate the wheel rim 106 and tire 108 about a drive axis 112 in the direction of arrow A (FIG. 1b). In different exemplary embodiments, the drive shaft assembly 104 may be pneumatically or hydraulically actuated or powered electrically. In another embodiment, a rotating turntable or other mechanism may be provided in lieu of the drive shaft assembly 104.

While the drive axis 112 is illustrated as being generally vertical in the embodiment depicted, the axis 112 may be oriented horizontally or otherwise in other embodiments, and the axis 112 may be selectively positionable in different positions relative to the base 102.

As the wheel rim 106 is rotated about the axis 112, one or more tire changing tools 114, 116 and 117 may be brought into physical contact or engagement with the tire 108 in the direction of arrow B (FIG. 1b) at respective locations proximate an outer periphery of the rim 106. The machine operator may visually move the tools 114, 116 and 117 into the proper position with respect to the tire 108 and wheel rim 106, and then the tire 108 and wheel rim 106 are rotated about the axis 112 with the tools 114, 116 and 117 engaged to the tire 108 to install or remove the tire.

The tool 114 is sometimes referred to as tire mount or demount tool. The tool 114 may include a wedge that is extended into an area between the wheel rim 106 and the tire 108 to separate an inner circumference of the tire 108 including the bead 118 (FIG. 1c) over the outer lip 119 (FIG. 1c) of the wheel rim 106 to remove the tire 108, or to engage the inner circumference of the tire 108 including the bead 118 on the outer lip 119 of the wheel rim 106 to install the tire 108. The tire 108 may be appropriately lubricated to facilitate easier removal and installation using the tool 114.

The tools 116 are sometimes referred to as bead breaker tools that exert pressure on the tire 108 to either break the tire bead seal 118 with the rim 106 or push the inner circumference of the tire 108 over the outer lip of the wheel rim 106 to install the tire 108. As shown in the exemplary embodiment in FIGS. 1a and 1b, two tools 116 are shown, one located above the tire 108 and the other located below the tire 108. In another embodiment, a single bead breaker tool could be provided.

The tools 117 are sometimes referred to as pressing tools. As shown in the exemplary embodiment in FIGS. 1a and 1b, two pressing tools 117 are shown that exert pressure on the tire sidewall in tire mounting and demounting procedures. Each pressing tool 117 is differently configured, one as a roller and the other having being adapted for stationary contact with the tire 108. The pressing tools 117 may be spaced from one another to maintain the tire bead 118 in a drop center 121 (FIG. 1c) of the wheel rim 106 during tire de-mounting procedures, or to push the tire bead 118 into the drop center 121 in a tire mounting procedure. While two or more pressing tools 117 are beneficial for mounting or de-mounting larger diameter tires and stiffer tires, one pressing tool may be provided in another embodiment and may be sufficient to change smaller diameter and more compliant tires.

The tools 114, 116, and 117 serve to supply sufficient tire insertion or removal forces at the correct angle and location with respect to the tire 108 such that the bead 118 of the tire 108 is forced out of or onto a bead seat on the wheel rim 106. While exemplary tire changing tools 114, 116, and 117 are illustrated, still other tire changing tools may be provided and used for bead breaking, tire mounting and/or demounting, locating a valve stem, locating a wheel weight, locating a wheel sensor such as a Tire Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS) sensor, or other purposes. Such other tools may be provided in addition to or in lieu of the tools 114, 116 and 117 as depicted.

Like many known machines, the effectiveness of the tire changing machine 100 is largely dependent on the ability of its operator to prepare the rim 106 and correctly position the tire changing tools 114, 116 and 117 to install or remove the tire 108 from the wheel rim 106. The bead breaker tool 116 and the mount and demount tool 114 exert respective pressure on the tire 108 to seat or unseat the tire bead 118 from the rim 106 when installing or removing the tire 108. If any of the tools 114, 116 or 117 are inadvertently placed in contact with the rigid wheel rim 106 or the rather rigid sidewall of the tire 108, the applied forces generated by the machine 100 through the tools 114, 116 and 117 may damage the wheel rim, the tire, or components of the machine 100. Safety issues are posed by the large amounts of force that can be generated in such instances. Additionally, if the wheel rim 106 includes wheel weights and the wheel weights have not been removed, one or more of the tire changing tools 114, 116 and 117 can come in contact with a wheel weight installed at the rim edge, causing the wheel weight to slide as the wheel is rotated and potentially damaging the rim.

During tire mounting and demounting procedures significant forces can build up that have the potential to damage the tire bead 118, other portions of the tire 108, or the mount/demount tool 114 or other of the tire changing tools 116 and 117. By monitoring the tactile forces in mounting and demounting procedures, tool damage can be prevented by adjusting operation of the machine in response to the detected tactile forces. Such adjustments in operation of the machine may include stopping motor rotation in the drive assembly 104, reducing the speed of rotation in the drive assembly 104,

reducing the motor torque applied during rotation of the drive assembly 104, or reducing the applied forces of one or more of the tools 114, 116 and 117.

More specifically, when the bead rollers 116 are used to exert pressure on the tire 108 to break the tire bead seal 118, the rollers 116 are first brought into contact with the tire 108 as near to the lip of the rim 106 as possible. Down force is applied to the upper roller 116 in a direction (indicated by arrow B in FIG. 1b) that is parallel to the wheel axis 112 to push the tire bead 118 off of the rim 106. If the roller 116 is inadvertently placed on the wheel rim 106, however, very large forces may be generated very quickly with very little movement between the upper roller 116 and the comparatively rigid and unforgiving rim that may result in damage to the tire 108, the rim 106, or to components of the machine. In contrast, if the roller 116 is correctly placed on the tire 108 there will be a more gradual increase in force along with movement of the tool as the tire bead 118 (FIG. 1c) is pressed away from the rim.

Further, assuming that the upper roller 116 has successfully dislodged the tire bead 118 from the wheel rim 106, further positioning of the roller 116 is often necessary. Specifically, it has been found that after a slight movement in the axial direction of arrow B it is then necessary to drive the roller 116 in a lateral direction (indicated by arrow C in FIG. 1b) that is perpendicular to the drive axis 112. This is necessary because otherwise the roller 116 will deform the sidewall of the tire 108 and then slide along the sidewall without removing the tire bead 118 from the wheel rim 106. If the roller 116 is moved toward the tire bead 118 it is able to act on a more stiff area of the tire which is typically closer to the bead and thereby remove the tire bead 118 from the wheel rim 106. The lateral movement of the rollers 116 in a direction transverse to the drive axis 112 as shown by arrow C presents additional opportunities for operator error in inadvertently placing the tool 116 in contact with the rim 106. Even if properly moved in the direction of arrow C to successfully dislodge the tire bead 118, the operator must remember to move the tool back in a direction opposite to arrow C before lifting it from the tire, or it will undesirably hit the wheel rim 106. Some operators are prone to overlooking this aspect of the procedure. As explained below, exemplary control systems provided in the machine 100 may automatically compensate for such difficulties and avoid human error in this regard.

As the wheel rim 106 and tire 108 are rotated about the axis 112 the tool 114 applies appropriately directed force to the tire 108 to either direct the tire 108 off of the wheel rim 106 (demounting) or onto the wheel rim 108 (mounting). The machine operator, however, may not have the tool 114 in the proper location, may not have the tire 108 in the correct position relative to the rim 106, or may rotate the wheel rim 106 at too high of a speed about the axis 112, all of which tend to place the tool in a bind. If the operator does not realize that the tool 114 is binding and continues with the procedure, damage can occur to the tire or to the tool.

In an effort to address difficulties in properly locating the tire changing tools 114 and 116 and undesirable consequences of improper tool placement, some machines are known having a sensory capability to detect a position of tools such as the tools 114 and 116 with respect to the tire 108 and/or wheel rim 106. For example, one known tire changing machine includes a switch mechanism that changes state when the bead breaker tool moves just beyond the outer edge of the rim, ensuring that the bead breaker is positioned to engage a tire at a predetermined location. Machine vision systems are also known that help align bead breaker tools

with respect to the wheel rim at predetermined locations. Such features have enjoyed varying degrees of success in avoiding human error in positioning the tools, but are nonetheless subject to the limitations of the operators to correctly utilize such features. The tools **114** and **116** may still be incorrectly positioned on the rim or on the tire sidewall, creating undesirable operating conditions.

While perhaps less likely than for the tools **114** and **116**, it is possible for a machine operator to improperly position the pressing tools **117**, either in contact with the wheel rim **106** or at another location that could inadvertently cause damage to the tire **108**, the rim **106** or component of the machine **100**.

Even if the tools **114**, **116** and **117** are correctly located on the tire **108**, the applied force generated by the tools **114**, **116** and **117** can still be quite large during tire installation and removal processes, and such forces can be somewhat difficult to control. Particularly during tire removal processes, a large buildup of force in the bead breaker tools **116**, for example, can suddenly be released when the tire bead seal is broken and the tire **108** deflects away from its seated location on the rim **106**, resulting in practically uncontrollable movement of the tool **116**. This is particularly the case for pneumatically actuated tools where a rapid loss in back pressure occurs as the tire bead is loosened, but to some extent many different types of actuators pose similar issues. Consequently, some damage to the tire **108**, the wheel rim **106**, wheel sensors within the tire and wheel rim assembly, and/or machine components may result even when the tools **114**, **116** and/or **117** are properly positioned. Likewise, the spontaneous release of large amounts of energy can be jarring to machine operators, as well as potentially hazardous.

To avoid undesirable effects due to misplacement of the tools **114**, **116** and **117** on the tire **108** or due to improperly preparing the rim for tire removal, the machine **100** is provided with sensors, controls and interfaces described below that overcome numerous disadvantages of existing tire changing machines. The tools **114**, **116** and **117** are coordinated by a control unit **120** that may include a controller (discussed below) and actuator components operatively connected to the controller for moving the tools **114**, **116** and **117** to various positions to accommodate varying sizes and diameters of wheel rims **106**. As will be explained below, the actuators may include, for example hydraulic cylinders, pneumatic actuators, and/or electric, pneumatic or hydraulic motors in illustrative embodiments. The tools **114**, **116** and **117** may be independently movable from one another, in response to outputs from the control unit **120**, along one or more axes of motion. The control unit **120** may accept exemplary inputs from known positioning encoders, Hall Effect sensors, and machine vision techniques to aid in the proper positioning of the tools **114**, **116** and **117** with respect to the tire **108** and the rim **106**.

A machine operator may manipulate input selectors **110b** and **110c**, for example, which communicate with the control unit **120** to move the tools **114**, **116** and **117** to desired positions. These input selectors may have the capability to override automated inputs made by a controller which is part of control unit **120**. In illustrative embodiments, the input selectors **110a**, **110b** and **110c** may be foot pedals located near the bottom of the machine base **102** for convenient use of the machine operator(s). In other embodiments, other known input selectors, including but not limited to levers, buttons, knobs, switches, joysticks, and touch sensitive screens may be employed in various locations on or near the machine **100**. An operator station **122** including a display **124** and an input device **126** including a keyboard or other input selectors may be optionally provided for the benefit of the operator. Still

other features of the machine may be provided, such as tire inflation systems and the like familiar to those in the art.

As will be explained in relation to the following figures, the machine control system, which includes the control unit **120**, also includes force detection elements **128** (FIG. **1b**) and position detection elements **129** (FIG. **1a**) for more effective control of the tools **114**, **116** and **117** in use. While one force detecting element **128** and two positioning elements are depicted, it is understood that other numbers of force and position detection elements may be provided in various locations on the machine **100**. As shown in FIG. **1b**, the force detection element **128** may be provided on a tool mounting bracket, although it could be located elsewhere in the machine such as a mounting element for a tool actuator that couples the actuator to the machine supporting structure. For example, as the tool actuator moves the tool **114** toward or away from the rotation axis to radially position the tool **114** relative to the drive axis **112**, or a tool actuator that moves the tool toward and away from the rim and tire in a direction parallel to the drive axis **112**, force may be detected as the tool engages the tire **108** and/or the wheel rim **106**. Likewise, the position detecting elements **129** are shown at particular locations in FIG. **1a**, but they could be located elsewhere in other embodiments. Also, various types of sensors capable of use for the force and detection elements **128** and **129** are explained below.

As will become evident below, the force and position detection elements **128**, **129** and control components associated with them are beneficially provided to facilitate safer and smoother tire installation and removal processes in an optimized manner with reduced potential for hazardous conditions to the machine operator. The force and position detection and control features facilitate beneficial methods of tire changing using the machine to perform various tire change procedures. The force detection elements **128** and **129** and controls such as those described below further provide advantageous informational feedback to the machine operator concerning expected or normal operating conditions to confidently guide the operator through a tire change procedure. Still further, the force and position detection elements **128** and **129** and control features also facilitate detection of abnormal or undesirable operating conditions that may otherwise result in damage to the rim, tire, or the tire changing machine. Operator safety may be enhanced with intuitive operator interfaces and controls.

The force detection assemblies, methods and systems disclosed below advantageously limit applied force to predetermined force levels in order to prevent damaging a tire, wheel rim, or tire changer part. Also, when used in combination with a location sensor or other positioning system known in the art, a determination can be made as to whether the force is effective or not (i.e. whether a drop in force was measured as the tire bead **118** (FIG. **1c**) is moved out of the bead seat of the wheel rim **106** so that appropriate action can be taken, including but not limited to activating an error mode wherein further application of force by one or more of the tools **114**, **116** and **117** is suspended, operating actuator elements for the tools **114**, **116** and **117** to anticipate or respond to a sudden drop in force as the tire bead seal breaks to provide more control of the tools **114**, **116** and **117** after the tire bead seal is broken, and providing a warning to the operator via a display or haptic feedback elements to let the operator know how much force has been released. Such force sensing and detecting capability may allow tire change procedures to be safely automated.

Exemplary control systems are described below in relation to FIGS. **2-9** including tactile feedback features allowing more effective control of the machine **100** and its compo-

nents, and exemplary tire change procedures, methods, algorithms and machine routine responsive to such tactile feedback are described below in relation to FIGS. 10-19. The various components utilized by the machine in tire changing operations may be driven by various types of actuators, including actuators providing rotational output movement (i.e., rotary actuators), and actuators providing linear output movement (i.e., linear actuators). The actuators for the components may be powered in various ways, including electric, hydraulic and pneumatic power.

As will be seen from the exemplary embodiments discussed below, various types of force feedback sensors may be used as the force detection elements 128 for the tire changing tools or other components. For example, the force detection elements 128 may include electrical sensors (e.g., voltage, current, inductive, capacitive, magnetic or resistive sensors), pressure sensors, optical sensors, imaging sensors, load bearing sensors, force sensors, acceleration sensors, torque sensors, deflection sensors and displacement sensors may be utilized with various types of actuators to provide feedback signals indicative of force (either directly or indirectly wherein force could be calculated or otherwise determined based on the feedback signal) applied by or generated in a component of the machine during a tire change procedure. Combinations of force feedback sensors for different components may be utilized in combination, and force may be detected along multiple axes of movement for the same or different components. While the following exemplary systems and procedures are described primarily in relation to operation of the tire changing tools, it is understood that feedback signals directly or indirectly indicative of force could be obtained by monitoring components other than the tools and tool actuators, such as components in the drive assembly or still other components in the machine.

In addition to tactile force feedback, in certain embodiments the machine control systems are enhanced with one or more position detecting sensors. A variety of position detecting sensors, including but not limited to Hall Effect sensors, capacitive sensors and Linear Variable Differential Transformer (LVDT) sensors familiar to those in the art, may be utilized to directly indicate a position of a movable machine component, or to indirectly indicate a position of a movable machine component by detecting speed or acceleration of a moving component. In other embodiments, positioning encoders, machine vision techniques or still other position detection elements may be utilized to allow a position of one or more components to be determined.

Positional feedback information for rotational movement and linear movement among multiple axes of motion for a variety of machine components can be used in combination with force detection feedback features to automate a variety of tire change procedures in whole or in part to provide machines of varying sophistication, and to detect a variety of normal and abnormal operating conditions of the machine.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a first exemplary control system 150 that may be used with the machine 100 for more optimal use and control of the machine 100 to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 2, the control system 150 generally includes a controller 152, an actuator in the form of an electric motor 154 for moving a component such as a tool 156, and an electrical sensor 158 monitoring an electrical parameter, for example, voltage or current, associated with the motor 154. An increase in voltage or current is an indication that force exerted by the tool 156 is also increasing. Likewise, a decrease in voltage or current is an indication that the force exerted by the tool 156 is decreasing. This relationship between voltage and current and force is known or can be

determined for any given motor 154 and can therefore be used to determine not only an increase or decrease in force but also the amount of force. Measuring an electrical parameter such as current or voltage provides the tire changer machine 100 with tactile feedback on how much force is being applied by the tire changer device. Other electrical parameters can be sensed and monitored using known sensors to provide alternative feedback signals indicative of force, such as capacitance, inductance, resistance or magnetic properties.

While a single motor 154 and electrical sensor 158 is illustrated, it is recognized that multiple actuator motors and multiple electrical sensors may be provided in further embodiments wherein independent movement of tools or multiple degrees of freedom of movement are desirable for one or more tools. For example, two actuators may be provided each moving the tool 156 in different directions or in different ways and a sensor may be provided to detect force associated with the different directions or manners of movement.

A variety of electrical motors are available for use as the electric motor 154 to move and position the tools relative to the wheel rim 106 and tire 108, as well as to provide appropriate force to install and remove a tire 108 from the wheel rim 106 (FIGS. 1a, 1b and 1c). Gearsets, cam followers, and other linkages may be provided to produce desired motion of tool 156 when the motor 154 is energized by the controller 152.

The electrical sensor 158 monitors electrical parameters associated with the motor 154 and provides a signal input to the controller 152 for feedback control purposes, detection of error conditions, and for optimization of the machine for an operator. A variety of voltage and current sensors, as well as other types of electrical sensors for monitoring other electrical parameters and characteristics, are known and commercially available from a variety of manufacturers, any of which may be used to provide a feedback signal input to the controller 152 that is indicative of the load on the motor 154 in use.

The tool 156 may correspond to any of the tools 114, 116 and 117 shown in FIGS. 1a through 1c, or to still other tools provided on the tire changing machine 100. The controller 152, in response to the feedback signal from the sensor 158, operates the motor 154 in the manner explained below to avoid undesirable operating conditions. The motor 154, in turn, advances or withdraws the tool 156 toward and away from the wheel rim 106 and tire 108 (i.e., in the direction of arrows B and C in FIG. 1b).

The controller 152 may reside in the control unit 120 (FIG. 1a) or at another location, and may be the same or different from the main or master controller for the machine 100. That is, the controller 152 may be a dedicated controller for the tool 156, or the functions of the controller 152 may be integrated or combined with another controller in the machine 100.

In various embodiments, the controller 152 may be for example, a microcomputer, a programmable logic controller, or other processor-based device. Accordingly, the controller 152 may include a microprocessor 160 and a memory 162 for storing instructions, control algorithms and other information as required to function in the manner explained below. The controller memory 162 may be, for example, a random access memory (RAM), or other forms of memory used in conjunction with RAM memory, including but not limited to flash memory (FLASH), programmable read only memory (PROM), and electronically erasable programmable read only memory (EEPROM). Alternatively, non-processor based electronics and circuitry may be provided in the controller 152 with equal effect to serve similar objectives. For example, a supercapacitor may be provided to give the con-

troller time to store procedure sensitive data such as the current state in a software based state machine in the event of power loss. Other elements such as line filters and capacitors for filtering noisy power may be included. Disk storage such as a CD-ROM, DVD, or hard disk may be provided for storage of various tire profiles that may be recalled to optimize the tire mount or demount process. The tire profiles may include detailed data regarding dimensional aspects of tires to be changed and other information concerning the tires that may be useful and beneficial to the machine operator or the control system as explained below.

A positioning element **164** optionally may be included as well and provides a feedback signal to the controller **152** that is indicative of the position of the tool **156**. The positioning element **164** may be a position encoder or other sensor, or may include machine vision components and the like familiar to those in the art. When so provided, the control system **150** can monitor position and force associated with the tool **156**, and can compare detected position and force conditions to confirm correct operation is taking place or detect error conditions and take appropriate action to prevent undesirable consequences.

The positioning element **164** is particularly beneficial when the tool **156** corresponds to the bead roller tool **116** (FIGS. **1b** and **1c**) as it is driven first in the direction of arrow B (FIG. **1b**) and then in the direction of arrow C (FIG. **1b**), or alternatively in both the directions of arrows B and C at once, during tire changing operations to fully remove the tire bead **118** (FIG. **1c**) from its seated position on the wheel rim **106**. After the tire bead **118** has been fully removed from its seated position, the tool **116** (corresponding to the tool **156** in FIG. **2**) is then raised in a direction parallel to the wheel axis **112** in a direction opposite to arrow C (FIG. **1b**), in order to remove it from the wheel rim/tire work area. Since the tool **116** has been moved toward the wheel rim **106** in the direction of arrow C, the roller **116** would undesirably contact the wheel rim **106** if the roller were simply raised straight up. By monitoring the position of the tool **156** (corresponding to the tool **116** in FIG. **1b**) using the positioning element **164** it is possible to know the location at which the tool **156** must be moved away from the wheel rim **106** (in a direction opposite to arrow C in FIG. **1b**) to prevent tool-to-wheel rim contact, and the controller **152** can automatically undertake returning the tool **156** back to a home position and remove any opportunity for mistake by the human operator of the machine **100**. As the tool **156** is returned, force and position are monitored for abnormal behavior. For instance, if the force for the tool **156** increases and the position change for tool **156** unexpectedly slows down, or even stops, the tool **156** might be prevented from moving because it is caught on the tire and/or rim. Once such an abnormality is detected, appropriate responsive action may be taken in response to unexpected or abnormal behavior of the tool **156** in use. Examples of responsive action include, but are not limited to, providing a warning to the operator, discontinuing movement of the tool **156**, or repositioning of the tool **156** to try get around whatever is preventing the tool **156** from returning to the home position.

An alarm element **166** may be connected to the controller **152**, and in various embodiments the alarm element may be audio, tactile and/or visual in nature, to alert a machine operator of problematic operating conditions of the machine **100**. Once an alarm condition is detected, instructions or explanation may be presented to the machine operator via the optional display **124**, a pre-recorded audio message, or by other means so that the operator can take appropriate measures to mitigate negative consequences.

As explained in further detail below, actions taken by the controller **152** may disable or de-energize the motor **154** when a predetermined maximum force limit is experienced, may disable or de-energize the motor **154** when expected movement of the tool **156** does not occur, or may control the motor **154** in anticipation of or response to a sudden drop in resistance by the tire **108** when the seal with the wheel rim **106** is finally broken.

An optional indicator **168** may also be provided for the machine operator's benefit to provide real time informational feedback for normal or expected operating conditions of the machine during a tire change procedure. As such, and in contrast to the alarm element **166**, the indicator **168** provides operator feedback indication concerning successful, error free operating conditions as detected by the controller **152**. That is, the indicator **168** may provide confirmation that the force feedback signal(s) are in an acceptable state and the machine and its tools is being used properly. The indicator **168** may provide step by step, real time feedback to the machine operator concerning the acceptable state of the machine. The indicator **168**, like the alarm element, may be audio, tactile and/or visual in nature, to indicate satisfactory use or operation of the machine. Instructions or explanation may be presented to the machine operator via the optional display **124**, a pre-recorded audio message, or by other means to indicate steps successfully performed in a tire change procedure, and optionally prompt the operator to perform next steps in the procedure.

It is understood that the functionality of the alarm element **166** and the indication element **168** could be combined into a single device if desired as long as different audio, tactile and/or visual cues were provided to distinguish positive operation of the machine without error and negative operation of the machine with error. Alternatively, the alarm element **166** and the indication element **168** may be separate devices in separate locations on the machine to aid the operator in rapidly distinguishing positive and negative feedback from the controller **152**. It is also contemplated that if the optional display **124** is provided, it may obviate any need for separately provided alarm elements and indicator elements as both alarm and indication features could be presented via the display **124**.

FIG. **3** is a block diagram of a second exemplary control system **170** that may be used with the machine **100** (FIGS. **1a**, **1b**, **1c**) for more optimal use and control of the machine **100** to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. **3**, the control system **170** is similar in some aspects to the control system **150** shown in FIG. **2**. Like the control system **150**, the control system **170** includes the controller **152** coupled to a motor **154** that moves the tool **156**. The voltage or current sensor **158** senses the amount of force exerted by the motor **154** and feeds that information back to the controller **152**. The position sensor element **164** provides the controller **152** with position information for the tool **156**.

Unlike the control system **150**, the control system **170** further includes a portion of the machine drive assembly **104**, such as a drive motor **172** (also shown in FIG. **1c**) for controllably rotating a wheel rim mount **174** that clamps or otherwise retains the wheel rim **106** (FIG. **1c**) as the machine drive assembly **104** rotates the wheel rim **106** about the drive axis **112** (FIG. **1a**) in a tire changing procedure. Various wheel rim mounts **174** are known that engage the wheel rim **106** in various ways, any of which may be used in exemplary embodiments. The wheel rim mount **174** is mounted stationary to the drive assembly **104** and rotates with the drive assembly **104**. The drive assembly **104** may include a center post or shaft provided with the wheel rim mount **174**. As

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another illustrative example, the drive assembly may alternatively include a rotating turntable or spindle with the wheel rim mount **174** provided thereon.

As shown in FIG. 3, the control system **170** further includes a position sensor element **176** (also shown in FIG. 1c) for providing the control system **170** with a wheel mount rotation position. Thus, the controller **152** may receive feedback indicating the degree of rotation of the wheel rim mount **174** by the drive assembly, which is driven by the drive motor **172**.

Thus the control system **170** utilizes numerous tactile feedback control inputs from numerous reference points as the tire changing machine is used, including feedback to the controller **152** concerning a rotational position of the wheel rim mount **174** provided by the position sensor **176**, feedback to the controller **152** concerning tool force provided by the electrical sensor **158**, and feedback to the controller **152** concerning tool position information provided by the sensor **164**. The controller **152** uses this tactile feedback information to control the tool motor **154**, the drive motor **172**, the optional display **124**, the optional alarm element **166**, and the optional indicator **168**.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a third exemplary control system **180** that may be used with the machine **100** (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) for more optimal use and control of the machine **100** to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 4, the control system **180** is similar in some aspects to the control system **150** (FIG. 2), but uses a different type of tool actuator and different forms of tactile feedback.

The control system **180** includes the controller **152** coupled to a tool actuator in the form of a pressure cylinder **182** that houses a reciprocating piston or ram for moving the tool **156**, and a pressure sensor **184** monitoring a fluid pressure associated with the pressure cylinder **182**. In an exemplary embodiment, fluid pressure associated with the cylinder **182** can be sensed electronically with an inline pressure sensor **184**. As fluid pressure increases or decreases, a corresponding signal from the pressure sensor **184** is communicated to the controller **152** to provide tactile feedback.

In different embodiments, the pressure cylinder **182** may be hydraulically actuated or pneumatically actuated, with the pressure sensor **184** providing a feedback signal to the controller **152** that is indicative of the force or pressure exerted by the pressure cylinder **182** with the tool **156**. While a single pressure cylinder **182** and sensor **184** is illustrated, it is recognized that multiple cylinders and multiple sensors may be provided in further embodiments wherein independent movement of tools or multiple degrees of freedom of movement are desirable for one or more tools. The positioning element **164** and the alarm element **166** or the indicator **168** may also optionally be provided. The controller **152** operatively responds to this tactile feedback information as further described below.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of a fourth exemplary control system **190** that may be used with the machine **100** (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) for more optimal use and control of the machine **100** to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 5, the control system **190** is similar in some aspects to the control system **180** shown in FIG. 4. Like the control system **180**, the control system **190** includes the controller **152** coupled to an actuator in the form of a pressure cylinder **182** that houses a reciprocating piston or ram for moving the tool **156**, and a pressure sensor **184** monitoring a fluid pressure associated with the pressure cylinder **182**. Fluid pressure associated with the cylinder **182** can be sensed electronically with an inline pressure sensor **184**.

As fluid pressure increases or decreases, a corresponding signal from the pressure sensor **184** is communicated to the

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controller **152** to provide tactile feedback to the controller **152**. A position sensor element **164** provides the controller **152** with position information for the tool **156**.

The control system **190** further includes the motor **172** for controllably rotating the wheel rim mount **174**. The control system **190** also includes a position sensor element **176** for providing the control system **190** with wheel rim mount position. The wheel rim mount **174** and the position sensor element **176** for the wheel rim mount **174** are described above in reference to FIG. 3.

Tactile feedback information concerning a position of the wheel rim mount provided by the sensor element **176**, sensed force of the tool **156** provided by the pressure sensor **184**, and position information for the tool **156** provided by the sensor **164** are each provided to the controller **152**. The controller **152** uses this tactile feedback information to control the tool pressure cylinder **182**, the drive motor **172**, optional display **124**, and optional alarm element **166** and indicator **168** as further described below.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a fifth exemplary control system **200** that may be used with the machine **100** (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) for more optimal use and control of the machine **100** to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 6, the control system **200** is similar in some aspects to the control systems described above.

The control system **200** includes the controller **152** receiving an input signal from a load sensor **202** associated with the wheel rim mount **174** of the machine **100**. In such an embodiment, an indirect force measurement is obtained by monitoring a reaction force exerted by the wheel rim **106** and tire **108** to the wheel mount **174**. A tool actuator **206**, which may be any of the actuators described herein, is operationally responsive to the controller **152** and moves the tool **156** toward or away from the wheel rim **106** and the tire **108**. When the tool **156** is utilized in tire changing operations, reaction forces are experienced at the wheel rim mount **174** that may be monitored with the load sensor **202**.

As an illustrative example, the wheel rim mount **174** may be provided on a center post or shaft of the drive assembly **104** (FIG. 1a) and the load sensor **202** may be a load sensing bearing associated with the center post of the shaft. One such load sensing bearing suitable for use as the load sensor **202** is manufactured by SKF for vehicles where the bearing supports the weight of a vehicle and yet measures the force exerted on the bearing in 5 degrees of freedom. Another suitable load sensor **202** is a bearing ring available from Kistler Instrumente AG for measuring cutting forces on milling machines and other industrial equipment.

As another illustrative example, the wheel rim mount **174** may be provided on a rotating turntable or spindle, and the load sensor **202** may be a force sensing bearing ring. Suitable force sensing rings are also made by Kistler.

The load sensor **202** provides a feedback signal to the controller **152** that is indicative of the force or pressure exerted by the tool actuator **206** and the tool **156**. While a single tool actuator **206** and a single load sensor **202** is illustrated, it is recognized that multiple actuators and more than one load sensor may be provided in further embodiments wherein independent movement of tools or multiple degrees of freedom of movement are desirable for one or more tools. The positioning element **164** and the alarm element **166** and indicator **168** may also optionally be provided.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram of a sixth exemplary control system **210** that may be used with the machine **100** (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) for more optimal use and control of the machine **100**

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to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 7, the control system 210 is similar in some aspects to the control system 200 described above.

The control system 210 includes the controller 152 receiving an input signal from the load sensor 202 associated with a wheel rim mount 174 of the machine 100. As described above, an indirect force measurement is obtained by monitoring a reaction force exerted by the wheel rim 106 and tire 108 to the wheel rim mount 174. A tool actuator 206, which may be any of the actuators described above, is operationally responsive to the controller 152 and moves the tool 156 toward or away from the wheel rim 106 and the tire 108. When the tool 156 is utilized in tire changing operations, reaction forces are experienced at the wheel rim mount 174 that may be monitored with the load sensor 202.

As shown in FIG. 7, the control system 210 further includes the drive motor 172 for controllably rotating the wheel rim mount 174. The control system 210 also includes the position sensor element 176 for providing the control system 210 with wheel rim mount position.

Various types of tactile feedback information may therefore be fed back to the controller 152, including information concerning a position of the wheel rim mount 174 provided by the position sensor 176, information concerning tool force provided by the load sensor 202, and information concerning a position of the tool 156 provided by the position sensor 164. The controller 152 uses this tactile feedback information to control the tool actuator 206, the drive motor 172, optional display 124, and optional alarm element 166 and indicator 168 as explained below.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram of a seventh exemplary control system 220 that may be used with the machine 100 (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) for more optimal use and control of the machine 100 to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 8, the control system 220 is similar in some aspects to the control systems 150 described above.

The control system 220 includes the controller 152 receiving an input signal from a force sensor 222 associated with a tool actuator 224 carrying the tool 156, in addition to the position sensor 164. In various embodiments, the actuator 224 may be any of the actuators described above, or still other actuators known in the art. The force sensor 222 may be any of the sensors previously described, or additionally may be a flexible, resistive sensor such as a Flexiforce™ sensor by Tekscan, a piezo sensor, a strain gage load cell, or still other sensors familiar to those in the art.

Recognizing that the tire changing machine 100 (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) typically involves a human operator moving the tool 156 to a particular location on the assembly of the wheel rim 106 and tire 108 (FIG. 1a), a haptic system 226 is further provided and is in communication with the controller 152 and an operator input selector 110 for operating the actuator 224 associated with the tool 156. The haptic system 226 is operationally responsive to the controller 152 and is activated by the controller 152 in response to feedback signals from the force sensor 222 and positioning sensor 164. The haptic system 226 provides sensory feedback to the human operator to provide the operator some guidance regarding how much force to apply at any given point in the tire mount or demount process. In contemplated embodiments, the haptic system 226 could be implemented on an input selector 110 such as a foot pedal, joy stick, lever, button, switch or other element operable with the operator's hands or feet, or that otherwise interfaces with the operator's sense of touch.

Various types of haptic devices and systems are known and may be used, with the haptic system 226 changing the behavior of the input selector 110 to provide tactile feedback to the

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human user that engages the input selector 110. In an exemplary embodiment, the haptic system 226 may vary the resistance of the input selector 110 as the operator attempts to manipulate it to move the tool 156. Alternatively the haptic system 226 may cause the input selector 110 to shake and/or vibrate as a warning to the human operator that sufficient force has been applied with the tool 156 and to use appropriate caution in applying further force.

In one example of the control system 220 in use, once the human operator is satisfied with the location of the bead breaker, he or she starts applying force to the tire by manipulating the input selector 110, thereby causing the controller 152 to operate the actuator 224 to move the tool 156 to engage the tire 108 on the machine 100. If the resultant force applied to the tire 108 by the tool 156, as detected by the force sensor 222, continues to increase with little or no movement of the tool 156, as determined by the positioning element 164, the haptic system is activated by the controller 152 so that the effort the human operator must exert at the input selector 110 to continue applying more pressure also increases.

On the other hand, if the force applied by the operator via the input selector 110 results in the tire bead 118 (FIG. 1c) moving from the bead seat of the wheel rim 106 then the haptic system 226 is operated by the controller 152 to decrease an amount of effort the operator must exert to continue to operate the tool 156.

If the tool 156 has moved the tire bead from the bead seat and the operator continues to apply pressure via the input selector 110, resulting in rapid movement of the tool 156, the haptic system 226 is operated by the controller 152 to create more feedback to the operator resulting in the operator having to exert more effort to increase pressure. The effect of the haptic system 226 opposing efforts of the operator serves to prevent the operator from mistakenly applying an inappropriate amount of force that may result in damage or loss of control of the tool 156 during one or more portions of a tire mounting or demounting operation.

As another example of the control system 220 in use, the haptic system 226 could make the input selector shake or vibrate when the tire bead 118 has been moved from the bead seat of the rim 106. Such shaking or vibration is an indication to the operator that additional force application with the tool 156 is inadvisable, and can coach the operator to successfully and properly use the tool 156. For example, the operator can take appropriate care not to break any wheel sensor such as tire pressure (TPMS) sensors that may be positioned on the inside cavity of the wheel rim/tire assembly by reducing the applied force as a result of the haptic system 226 giving feedback to the operator that excessive force is being applied.

In still other embodiments, the haptic system 226 may also include more subtle feedback features for the benefit of the operator such as providing one or more lamps or other illumination element with adjustable intensity. In such an embodiment, the controller 152 may adjust or change the brightness of emitted light to represent the applied force to the machine operator. In such an embodiment, the light may become brighter as more force is applied and dimmer as less is applied. As another example, one or more light elements could selectively be turned on or off without adjusting the intensity of illumination. Similar variations are possible using different sounds or sounds of varying intensity instead of light. Combinations of sounds and light are likewise possible.

FIG. 9 is a block diagram of an eighth exemplary control system 230 that may be used with the machine 100 (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) for more optimal use and control of the machine 100

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to change tires. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 9, the control system 230 is similar in some aspects to the control systems described above.

The control system 230 includes the controller 152 receiving an input signal from a force sensor 222 associated with a tool actuator 224 carrying the tool 156. In various embodiments, the actuator 224 may be any of the actuators described above, or still other actuators known in the art. The control system 230 also includes the drive motor 172 receiving input from controller 152 and used for controlling the rotational position of the wheel rim mount 174. The wheel rim mount position sensor 176 is also included to provide controller 152 with input indicating the rotational position of the wheel rim.

The haptic system 226 as shown is part of the operator input 110 and is operationally responsive to controller 152. The controller 152 activates the haptic system 226 in different ways depending on inputs the controller 152 receives from the wheel rim mount position sensor 176, tool position sensor 164, and actuator force sensor 222.

While various control systems are illustrated in FIGS. 2-9, it is contemplated that aspects of the control systems described could be selectively combined to provide still other variations of control systems. For example, the haptic system 226 described in relationship to FIGS. 8 and 9 could be provided in the control systems shown in FIGS. 2-7. As another example, it is contemplated that the controller 152 could monitor and appropriately control several different types of actuators (e.g., electric motors or pneumatic or hydraulic cylinders) using feedback signals from different types of sensors. The exemplary control systems are scalable to accommodate various numbers of tire changing tools, and sensors may be provided in redundant fashion (e.g., sensors may be provided that are associated with the actuators of the tire changing tools and the wheel rim mount) to provide fail back features to ensure failsafe operation in the event that one of the sensors malfunctions.

FIG. 10 illustrates a method flowchart of exemplary processes 300 utilized in the machine 100 (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) to change tires 108. FIG. 10 is provided as a non-limiting example of various processes that can be implemented with and executed by the controller 152 in the control systems shown in FIGS. 2-9.

As shown in FIG. 10, the method 300 includes providing the force detection sensors at step 302, such as any of the sensors described above or other known sensors. Step 302 may also include connecting the sensors provided to the controller 152 in the machine 100. The method also optionally includes, as shown at step 304, providing position sensors and elements 304 such as those described above and connecting them to the controller 152 in the machine 100.

The machine operator may commence a tire changing operation by loading a wheel rim 106 and tire 108 onto the machine 100 and appropriately securing the wheel rim to the machine. The operator may then at step 306 position the tools 114, 116 and 117 to the locations that visually appear to be the correct locations to the operator. The operator then begins to apply force to the tire at step 308, using the appropriate input selector 110 (FIG. 1a) of the machine, to engage the tools 114 and/or 116 with the tire to install or remove the tire from the wheel rim. Optionally, the machine 100 can be started such that the procedure progresses automatically using the sensing elements to control the procedure.

When the operator initiates the application of force in step 308, the controller 152 begins to monitor at step 310 the application of force via the feedback signals from the sensor or sensors provided in step 302. The controller 152 determines at step 312, based on the force feedback signals from

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the sensors, whether the force is less than a predetermined maximum force (F_{max}) for the tire changing operation. F_{max} may optionally be recalled from the controller memory 152, for example, based on a parameter of the tire 108, such as an aspect ratio entered or selected by an operator using the input device 126 (FIG. 1a) of the machine 100. F_{max} may be a theoretical or empirically determined threshold force limit that corresponds to a sufficient, but not excessive, force for normal tire changing operations. If the force limit F_{max} is exceeded, the controller 152 may infer that the tool has been inadvertently and undesirably placed in contact with the rigid wheel rim 106 instead of the tire 108. The force limit F_{max} is preferably selected to be a level generally well below a level that would cause the wheel rim 106 to bend or deform.

If the force limit F_{max} is determined to be exceeded at step 312, the controller operates, or fails to continue to operate the actuators, to release the applied force at step 314. For example, in an embodiment involving a pneumatic actuator, an air valve may be utilized to release the air pressure and associated force. A release valve could likewise be utilized in an embodiment involving a hydraulic actuator to release the applied force. In an embodiment having an electric motor actuator, the controller 152 could initiate an instant decrease in voltage or current to release the force applied by the motor. By releasing the force at step 314, it can be ensured that the wheel rim 106 will not be damaged, even if a tool is incorrectly placed in contact with it.

After applied force is released at step 314, the controller 152 may conclude that an error condition exists and optionally activate an alarm at step 316, such as an audio or visual alarm, to alert the machine operator of an error condition. In response, the operator may take appropriate action to correct the error condition, including but not limited to backing off the tools and repositioning them. Optionally, in an embodiment wherein the machine 100 includes a display 124, the controller 152 may present or display a message or instruction at step 318 to the operator explaining that the force limit had been reached and to check or verify the proper placement of the tool before proceeding.

In an alternative embodiment, a rate of increase of the applied force can also be monitored to provide a means to evaluate whether the tool is engaged at the proper location of the tire. It is anticipated that the applied force would increase much more rapidly when the tool engages the wheel rim (an error condition) as opposed to the tire (a normal and proper condition), and such increases may be empirically determined to distinguish a normal and proper condition from an error condition.

Optionally, and as indicated in step 324, the controller 152 may also monitor the position or movement of the tool, and using the feedback signal from the sensors provided in step 304, determine whether an expected amount or degree of movement of the tool has resulted at step 324. In a normal tire changing operation when the tools are correctly located on the tire, one would expect to see some deflection of the tool as the applied force is increased. If the force is observed to be increasing, but expected movement of the tool has not occurred, it is probable that the tool is engaging the wheel rim and not the tire, and the controller 152 may accordingly release the applied force at step 314 if the applied force is greater than F_{max} , activate an optional alarm at step 316, and optionally display appropriate instruction to the operator at step 318.

As indicated at step 326, the controller 152 further determines whether a drop in monitored force has occurred. If so, the tire bead seal has likely been broken and further application of force is unnecessary. That is, the force sensors allow

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the controller **152** to determine when bead breaking is complete. During normal bead breaking, the force applied to the tire **108** will remain substantially consistent. If this force suddenly drops off it can be assumed that the bead breaking operation is complete. The controller **152** may lower the applied force at this point to prevent the tool from rapidly moving into the cavity between the wheel rim **106** and the tire **108**. Any of the techniques previously described for step **314** may be used to release the force at step **330**. The release of force or pressure at this point generally prevents inadvertent damage to tire pressure sensors or other elements inside the cavity of the tire and wheel rim. Also, a degree of operator safety is provided by releasing the force or pressure associated with the tool once the tire bead seal is broken.

If expected movement of the tool is optionally being monitored and there has been a decrease in the applied force at step **326**, the controller **152** determines at step **328** if the movement has been enough to ensure that the entire bead is completely moved from the bead seat. If there has been enough movement then the force is released at step **330**. If there has not been enough movement then the cycle of force and monitoring continues until there is enough movement sensed by the controller **152**.

The force monitoring at steps **310** and **312** may be beneficial even after the tire bead seal is broken. For example, if after the tool moves the tire a certain distance and the monitored force starts to increase again the controller **152** can again immediately release and lower the applied force. An optional alarm or warning could be displayed to an operator as a result of such a second increase in force. The second increase in force would likely be the result of the tool contacting a wheel sensor such as a tire pressure (TPMS) sensor or other feature of the tire that could be damaged by the tool. By releasing applied force, such damage can be avoided.

The controller **152** may record or save in the controller memory or other location specific operational force and position parameters, for example, at optional step **332** that corresponds to a successful tire change operation wherein detected forces and/or positions are acceptable or below the predetermined force and position limits for all aspects of the procedure. That is, operational force and position profiles for the tools or other machine components may be created by one or more machine operators and be associated with a tire and wheel rim identifier. The successful force and position profiles may therefore serve as baselines for control and evaluation of the same procedure performed on a wheel rim and tire combination of the same type. In one embodiment, both force data and corresponding position data may be stored in the profile. In another embodiment, only the position data is stored as it would be expected that execution of the position data would generate nearly the same force data when re-executed on a similar tire and wheel rim combination. In addition, the machine operator may enter tire parameters such as the aspect ratio of the tire, a rim bead diameter (nominal rim diameter) and/or outside diameter. Such tire parameters may be associated with the stored procedure data for future recall.

Saved force and/or position profiles, for example, may be recalled at optional step **334** for future use with the same or similar tire and rim combinations. Optionally, the force and position profiles may be presented or displayed to the machine operator at step **336** for his or her selection. If a tire force and position routine is selected by the operator at step **336**, the controller may proceed to automatically position the tools **306** and apply force **308**, all the while proceeding to monitor applied force and optionally monitor positions of the tool at steps **310**, **312**, **324**, **326** and **328**. Absent an error

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condition being detected, the controller **152** may complete the force and position routine without human assistance. In another embodiment, force and position profiles, or other types of profiles for one or more machine components may be pre-programmed into the machine.

It is contemplated that one or more unique operational profiles may be utilized, whether pre-programmed or saved by an operator, for distinct operation of various machine components that may be executed alone or in concert to perform a tire change procedure on the machine. Each profile may include operational data and information defining aspects to be controlled and/or monitored to perform a tire change procedure using the component. Such operational data and information for such a profile may include, for example, one or more of force, position, acceleration, torque, time and displacement data and parameters for operating the components and defining a path of motion in three dimensional space that corresponds to a tire change procedure. A rate of change of one or more, force, position, acceleration, torque, and displacement parameters may also be captured in an operational profile which the machine controller(s) can use to operate the components. It is recognized that the operational profiles may be organized and stored in various ways, including but not limited to look up tables, graphs, mathematical representation or routines that may be input to the machine controller in whole or in part for control and monitoring purposes. The operational profiles may effectively serve as templates defining baseline control and monitoring thresholds for determining acceptable or unacceptable machine operation.

In general, because of the unique operational profiles, the components are operated in a distinct or different manner depending on which of the operational profiles is selected for execution. Each operational profile may be associated with a different tire and rim combination such that the machine controls may operate the components differently for each different tire and rim combination. That is, for example, in each of the distinct profiles the components may be operated along different motion paths, may be operated at different speeds, may be operated for a given amount of time, and may be utilized to generate different amounts of force. Additionally, the operational profiles may define relatively simple or complex motion paths and application of force as appropriate. The data, parameters and information contained in each of the respective unique operational profiles is therefore different such that the starting locations, starting angles, end effector paths, speed, acceleration, time of execution and other parameters of interest are not the same. A number of unique operational profiles may be created and stored to provide optimal and customized machine operation for a great variety of wheel rim and tire combinations.

In still other contemplated embodiments, operational profiles may be stored that generate similar motion paths of components in a tire change operation, but are distinct in the amount of force utilized or the speed of operations. For example, a gentle profile, a light duty profile and a heavy duty profile may be created using otherwise similar, if not exact, motion paths of components but with different, and increasing, amounts of force for the gentle, light duty and heavy duty profiles. As another example, a slow profile, a medium profile and a fast profile may be provided that involve similar, if not exact, motion paths of the components but at different, and increasing speeds for the slow, medium and fast profiles. The machine operator may select the most appropriate profile for use in light of his or her own experience operating the machine, particular tire and rim combinations, and other factors.

Various operational profiles may be created and stored and may be run concurrently in a tire change operation. For example, one operational profile may be selected for the drive assembly and another profile may be selected for each of the tire changing tools needed to complete a tire change procedure. The drive assembly profile and the tool profile may then be run in combination by the controller. In other embodiments, the operational profiles may include parameters, data and information for controlling and monitoring the drive assembly and one or more tire changing tools, for example.

Once a number of operational profiles are saved at optional step 332, the machine 100 is capable of changing a wide variety of tires for a variety of different rims using control systems such as those described. By knowing what type of tire and rim the tire changing machine is working with, which the operator can input to the machine using the optional input device 126 (FIG. 1a), the tire changing machine can recall and execute the appropriate starting location, starting angle, and end effector path of one or more tools to complete the tire changing operation, while still monitoring force to confirm that they remain within acceptable limits.

Various techniques could be used to input tire and rim information to the machine. In various exemplary embodiments, the machine may read or otherwise accept data and information concerning rims and tires using bar code scanners, radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, or other known technology. In such scenarios, data and information for the tire and/or rim may be provided by the tire and/or rim manufacturer or another party and may be input to the machine using bar coded labels, RFID tags or other technology that are read by a compatible reader or scanner. Using bar codes, RFID elements and other technology, specific types of tires and rims, as well as the necessary data for the machine controls described herein, may be self-identifying to the machine as they are introduced. The machine operator need not have any specific knowledge of the tire or rim in such a scenario.

As another example, tire and rim data could be correlated with graphics, including but not limited to pictures of the tires and rims, that may serve as a basis for inputting the necessary data and information to the machine. For example, the graphics could be presented to the machine operator, via the machine or otherwise, and when the operator selects one of the graphics the data corresponding to the selected picture is used to implement the controls described herein. Using such a graphical scheme, the operator need have only general knowledge of the tire and rim to make the initial selection, and the particular data needed for the controls is then used by the machine to control and monitor the machine as described herein. The data corresponding to the selected graphic could be pre-stored on the machine or provided from another source, but generally without further action of knowledge required by the machine operator. Various color coded schemes, numeric schemes, alphanumeric schemes and other graphics schemes (e.g., shapes, symbols, etc.) are possible in graphics-based systems of this type.

In still another example, the machine operator may input specific information regarding the tire and rim, such as an aspect ratio or other information. In scenarios such as these, the machine operator is required to have some specific knowledge of the tire or rim in order to effectively utilize the machine as described herein. If not already known to the operator, the operator may look up the aspect ratio or other information from the machine memory or another source (e.g., a catalog, a reference manual, a website, a database on the machine or separately provided, or another computer system having the needed information). The aspect ratio or

other information entered by the operator may be utilized to carry out the control scheme described. If the specific input information is not itself sufficient for the control needs, it can be used as a basis to retrieve other information stored on the machine or elsewhere in different embodiments, or serve as a basis for calculating or deriving other parameters necessary for the control schemes as described.

Communication links and the like may be utilized to allow the machine to retrieve and download tire and rim information from other sources if not already stored on or made available to the machine. Such communication links include, but are not limited to, local area networks (LANs) and Internet connections. In such embodiments, bidirectional communication between the machine and other computer systems is possible such that the machine may upload and download data and information to and from peripheral computer systems. Such communication capability may be used to provide new and updated control routines and procedures to the machine, as well as to provide data regarding operation of the machine for diagnostic and troubleshooting purposes, or perhaps even data and information of interest to tire and rim manufacturers.

Returning now to FIG. 10, for procedures where the human operator is part of the control loop, the optional haptic system can be activated as shown at step 338 at appropriate points to provide tactile feedback and guidance to the human operator regarding how much force is needed, not needed, or is appropriate to complete the tire changing operation. Also, at optional step 340, the controller may provide indication to the operator concerning detected states and conditions of the machine that are consistent with normal and proper use.

FIG. 11 illustrates a method flowchart 400 of preparing a tire for unseating a tire bead from the wheel rim bead seat utilized by the machine 100 (FIG. 1a, 1b, 1c) to change tires 108. FIG. 11 is provided as a non-limiting example of various processes that can be implemented in and executed by the controller 152 in the control systems shown in FIGS. 2-9.

As shown in FIG. 11, the method 400 starts by the operator mounting the tire 108 on the machine 100 with the valve stem at a known rotational location on the machine 402 and appropriately securing the wheel rim to the machine at step 402. Mounting the tire at step 402 with the valve stem at a known location 402 allows for positional tactile feedback of the valve stem location to a controller 152 from the position sensor element 164.

Once mounted, the operator at step 404 removes the Schrader valve (wheel sensor) from the valve stem or removes the entire valve. The normal industry practice is to let the air pressure drop to an equalized level with the air pressure outside the tire. However, the operator can use an optional tire pressure tool at step 406 which controllably lowers the tire pressure to an acceptable level for demounting the tire. At step 406, the operator would attach the pressure device at step 408 to the valve stem after removing the Schrader valve (wheel sensor), or alternatively attach the pressure device at step 408 to the valve stem hole after removing the valve stem. Using operator input selectors 110, the operator enters the aspect ratio of the tire, a rim bead diameter (nominal rim diameter) and tire outside diameter at step 410 so that the controller 152 knows the propensity of the tire sidewall to roll over or give way to the force of the tool before the tire bead can be unseated from the bead seat of the rim, aspects of which may be stored in the memory of the controller 152. The controller 152 can recall the amount of recommended pressure for the entered aspect ratio and adjust the pressure in the tire to the recalled level at steps 412 and 414. Some tires with larger aspect ratios may benefit from having some amount of air pressure in the tire for unseating the bead.

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Because the pressure device would stay connected as the wheel rim is rotated it is advantageous for the pressure device to come up through the center of the tire changing machine so that it is easier to rotate while attached to the rim.

Alternatively, the aspect ratio may not be entered at all. Instead, the optional tire pressure device may provide tactile feedback with a connect/no connect output to the controller **152**. If the optional tire pressure device is connected the operator has determined that they would like some air pressure in the tire for unseating the bead and the controller **152** lowers the pressure to a predetermined amount. If the optional tire pressure device is not connected then the operator has chosen to let all of the air pressure out of the tire for unseating the bead.

At step **416**, the operator may position the tool on the sidewall of the tire near the rim lip. Alternatively, an automated tire changing machine embodiment that includes positioning sensors such as an imaging type of sensor, which can detect where the wheel rim edge ends and the tire begins, could undertake step **416** automatically.

Steps **418**, **420**, **422** and **424** adjust the force of the tool so that the tool is engaging or touching the tire sidewall surface but the controller is not applying the kind of pressure needed to remove the bead from the bead seat of the rim. Likewise, if the operator is applying the pressure with an operator input selector **110**, the controller **152** limits the amount of pressure the operator can apply using the tool's tactile feedback. Once a desired level of pressure has been reached, it is maintained until the controller **152** is ready to change it. As such, if the position of the tool changes, the down force of the tool is maintained throughout the change of position.

FIG. **12** illustrates a method flowchart **440** of utilizing the tactile feedback of the machine **100** (FIG. **1a**, **1b**, **1c**) to position a tool next to the rim **106**. FIG. **12** is provided as a non-limiting example of various processes that can be implemented in and executed by the controller **152** in the control systems shown in FIGS. **2-9**.

As shown in FIG. **12**, the method **440** starts at step **442** with the tool maintaining a down force (i.e., a force in the direction of arrow B in FIG. **1b**) on the tire sidewall using down force tactile feedback sensing on a mounted tire secured to the machine **100**. The force or pressure maintained at step **442** may be carried over from step **424** of FIG. **11**, or otherwise selected by an operator or determined by the controller in different exemplary embodiments.

The rotational location of the mounted tire is then sensed at step **444** to initialize the rotational home position before starting the rotation of the mounted wheel rim and associated tire. One of the optional haptic sensing modes may be activated at step **446** at this point to give the operator a signal that lateral force (i.e., in the direction of arrow C in FIG. **1b**) is being applied to the tool at step **448**.

The lateral force applied to the tool moves the tool against the edge of the wheel rim. When the tool impinges the relatively unmovable rim edge the lateral force pressure increases. The increase in the lateral force pressure of the tool is sensed and fed back to the controller **152** as tactile feedback so that the controller **152** can determine at step **450** when the tool has been repositioned next to the rim edge. To make this determination at step **450**, the controller **152** can compare the sensed lateral force to a predetermined value recalled from the controller's memory or the controller can compare the sensed lateral force to the initial lateral force prior to lateral movement of the tool. Once the tool has been repositioned the optional haptic system's side lateral mode may be deactivated **452** and the increasing lateral force pressure may be stopped and maintained at step **454** by the controller **152**.

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Additionally, if the tool should not impinge the rim edge and continue to be repositioned inward toward the axis of rotation **112** (i.e., in the direction of arrow C in FIG. **1b**), the tactile feedback sensing for tool position can be used. The sensed position of the tool is sent to the controller **152** and the controller **152** can compare the position to a predetermined position limit recalled from memory for the tool. If the position limit is reached the lateral force would stop and an optional alarm **166** would activate and/or an optional display **124** would display instructions for the operator.

In an alternative embodiment, the tool is placed over the sidewall of the tire. Using a first tactile feedback for the tool, the tool is lowered in a direction parallel to the wheel rim's axis of rotation (i.e., the axis **112** in FIG. **1a**) until the force feedback sensor indicates an increase in force. The increase in force indicates that the pressing tool is contacting or touching the compliant side wall of the tire enough to deflect it slightly. The machine drive motor **172** is then engaged to rotate the wheel rim mount **174**. With the wheel rim mount rotating and the tactile feedback for the tool maintaining a force to keep the tool engaged with the tire sidewall, the tool is moved laterally or perpendicular to the wheel rim's axis of rotation (i.e., in the direction of arrow C in FIG. **1b**) while a second tactile feedback for the pressing tool is monitored. The second tactile feedback detects and monitors the lateral force, as opposed to the axial force detected and monitored by the first tactile feedback. When the second tactile feedback for the tool shows an increase in force it indicates that the tool is in contact with and placed against the rim edge. The rim edge location can be confirmed by the controller **152** when the second tactile feedback shows a force that is above a predetermined limit, a predetermined rate of force increase, or a combination of force limit and rate of force increase. The force limit and rate of force increase may be empirically determined, with the controller **152** comparing detected forces and rate of force increases to the empirically established ones to distinguish a normal or proper tool operation from an error condition.

With the edge of the rim having been detected, the first tactile feedback for the pressing tool is utilized to increase force in the axial direction, while the second tactile feedback is used to maintain a sufficient amount of lateral force to keep the tool in contact with the edge of the wheel rim. The axial force is increased as the wheel rim mount **174** is rotated until either a maximum force is detected (signifying an error condition) or until there is a drop in axial force detected (signifying that the tire bead has been unseated from the bead seat of the wheel rim).

In another embodiment, a diagnostic procedure is possible. Configured with the force and position sensing as described, the tool may be used to detect abnormalities in the tire. To do so, the tool applies force to any position on the tire sidewall including the tire bead as wheel rim mount **174** is rotated. The controller **152** monitors the force feedback and the movement of the tool, and deviations in detected force and movement may be used to detect tire abnormalities. If abnormalities are detected, instructions or warnings may be displayed on the optional display **124**. An exact rotational location of a tire abnormality can be identified and stored by the controller **152** by monitoring rotation of the wheel mount **174** as well as the force and movement of the tool. Once the rotational location of a tire abnormality is known, the wheel rim mount **174** can be rotated to a position which the operator can identify and inspect the detected abnormality.

In order to break the bead of the tire, the bead breaker tool moves primarily in an axial direction (i.e., the direction of arrow B in FIG. **1b**). The bead breaker tool is moved in the

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lateral direction (i.e., the direction of arrow C in FIG. 1b), however, to keep the tool as close to the bead as possible to facilitate optimal bead breaking. The lateral movement of the bead breaker tool causes it to be partly inside, or underneath the bead flange of the wheel rim as shown in FIG. 1c. At this point, if the bead breaker tool (i.e., the tool 116 shown in FIGS. 1a, 1b and 1c) is retracted in the axial direction (opposite to arrow C in FIG. 1b), the tool would strike the bead flange and potentially damage the wheel rim or the tool. It is therefore desirable to monitor tool position as well as force in this aspect of the procedure. When it is sensed that the tool is in contact with the tire sidewall and at a proper initial position, the controller may record or store the initial location of the tool. As the bead breaking procedure progresses, the path of the tool is monitored and can be retracted along the same path to avoid inadvertent contact with the rim. Both the upper and lower tools 116 can be controlled in such a manner.

As shown in FIG. 13, a method of detecting wheel weight 460 starts at step 462 with the tool properly positioned against the rim edge and adjacent tire secured to the machine 100. The tool may be located as the result of the routine shown in FIG. 12, may be manually performed by the machine operator, or may be otherwise determined in various examples.

The rotational location of the mounted tire is then sensed at step 464 to initialize the rotational home position to the controller 152 before starting the rotation of the mounted wheel rim and tire. The wheel rim mount is then rotated at step 466 by a predetermined amount to obtain an average of force and/or position readings of the tool at steps 468 and 470.

The average values obtained at steps 468 and 470 are used as a filter to remove any sensed wheel weight obstruction from the force and position readings obtained by the control system. It is realized that the average could be determined for such filtering purposes in various ways, such as the mean, median, or moving average of the values.

After establishing the position and force of the tool against the rim with no wheel weights at steps 466 to 470, the rotational location of the mounted tire is again sensed to initialize the rotational position sensing to the controller 152 before starting the determination procedure of any wheel weight locations as the tire is further rotated at step 472. Steps 474, 476, 478, 480, and 482 utilize the tactile feedback provided to the controller 152 of the sensed tool force and position and rotational position of the rim to determine when either the tool force or position varies from the established rim force and position from steps 466-470 by a predetermined amount for a complete revolution of the mounted wheel rim and tire assembly. If a tool force and position variation occurs the controller 152 records the rotational position and variation information at steps 476 and 480.

Once the rim has been inspected by the machine 100 for wheel weights, the controller 152 either determines that wheel weights need to be removed (described in relation to FIG. 15 and method 530) or that the rim has no wheel weights and is ready to have the tire bead unseated from the rim bead seat (described in relation to FIG. 14 and method 490). It should be realized that any number of mechanical implementations which sense force and/or position could be used to detect the wheel weight location on a rim similar to the described method of using machine 100's tool. It should also be realized that an alternative to using the sensed position or sensed force of a mechanical apparatus moving along the rim of the tire would be to use other types of sensing such as vision sensing, ultrasonic sensing, and electrical conduction sensing for sensing the location of a wheel weight.

An exemplary method 490 shown in FIG. 14 used to force the tire bead from the rim bead seat starts with the tool being

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positioned at step 492 on the sidewall of the tire and against the edge of the wheel rim. At this point, there is already some force against the tire sidewall and some force against the rim edge. It should be realized that the force against the rim is maintained as the force against the tire sidewall and more specifically the force against the tire bead increases. Maintaining the force against the rim is necessary to force any tool between the wheel rim and the tire bead. Steps 498-512 focus on adjusting only the pressure against the tire, but because tactile feedback is provided to the controller 152 for force and position of the tool, the controller 152 can recall from memory any number of algorithms, methods, or procedures for increasing or decreasing the force against the tire and the rim. These algorithms, methods, or procedures also include changing the speed and/or direction of the rotating wheel mount based on tactile feedback to the controller 152 of position, speed, and direction of the rotating wheel mount. Because this exemplary method focuses only on the force against the tire, step 494 has the controller 152 only recording the tactile feedback of the tool force against the tire to initialize what will become the maximum tire force used to unseat the bead from the bead seat of the rim and the current position of the tool to serve as a marker of where the tool started. Note that the position of the tool could be any or all of the relative or absolute positions along an x, y and/or z axis of a Cartesian coordinate system. A mode for the optional haptic feedback system to the operator is then activated at step 496 for the increasing down force of the tool against the tire.

Steps 500 and 502 increase the force of the tool against the tire until the force has increased by a predetermined amount. If there is no increase in force then at step 504 the controller 152 looks for downward movement of the tool in the axial direction (i.e., in the direction of arrow B in FIG. 1b). Downward movement of the tool, if present, in combination with a decrease in detected tool force indicates that the tire bead has been unseated from the rim bead seat. If no downward movement of the tool is detected, the controller 152 continues to increase the downward force. If the pressing tool force increases by a predetermined amount, the controller records the force at step 507 prior to stopping the application of force at step 508. If the tool has moved a predetermined maximum amount for detecting the unseating of the tire bead at step 512 then the optional haptic system can be turned off at step 516 and the force and position data can be recorded at step 520 before verifying the tire bead seat is unseated (described in relation to FIG. 19 and method 620).

If the tool hasn't moved a predetermined maximum amount at step 512 then the amount of tool force against the tire is compared at step 510 to a predetermined maximum amount of force. If a predetermined maximum amount of force hasn't been exceeded then the force continues to increase at step 500. If on the other hand the maximum amount of force has been exceeded, the optional haptic system is deactivated at step 514 and the amount of movement is checked at step 518 to determine if movement is related to the rim or to the tire bead. If there wasn't enough of a predetermined movement then steps are taken to verify the position of the tool (described in relation to FIG. 16 and method 560). If there was some movement then the tire rotation is stopped and instructions to the operator are presented to the operator at step 521.

An exemplary method 530 for wheel weight removal is shown in FIG. 15. In method 530, it is assumed that the controller 152 already has knowledge of the existence and location of wheel weights on the mounted rim from a previous method such as via the method 460 shown in FIG. 13. It is very likely that the tool is against the rim lip where wheel

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weights may be installed so the first step is to reposition the tool away from the rim lip at step 532. The controller 152 does this by controlling the forces that move the tool and receiving tactile feedback on both force and position of the tool. At steps 536, 538 and 540 the controller 152 releases the forces on the tool and then any control 540 that the machine 100 had on the tool.

The controller 152 may then recall from memory the location of a wheel weight, and at step 542 rotates the wheel rim to a location that is convenient for an operator to remove the wheel weight. Instructions to the operator may be displayed on the optional display 124 at step 544. After the operator has removed the wheel weight, the operator uses an operator input selector 110 to signal to the controller 152 at step 546 that the wheel weight has been removed. The controller 152 then recalls at step 548 any other locations that a wheel weight may have been found, and if such locations exist the controller 152 runs steps 542, 544, and 546 again. If there are no other locations then operator instructions are displayed to the operator on the optional display 124 at step 550.

An exemplary method 560 for warning the operator of a problem is shown in FIG. 16. In method 560, many of the illustrated steps stop and release active components applying forces and warn the user of a problem. An exemplary method is also contemplated where the controller acts to stop force increases, but maintains forces generated, while still providing a warning to the machine operator of a potential problem.

An exemplary method 580 for allowing the operator to cancel a routine on the machine 100 is shown in FIG. 17. The method 580 is similar to the method 560 (FIG. 16) in that many of the steps stop and release active components applying forces and display operator warnings and/or instructions. The primary difference is method 580 is activated by the operator interacting with an operator input selector 110 which interrupts whatever routine the controller 152 was in the process of executing, including but not limited to any of the methods described above. Method 560 on the other hand is initiated by the controller 152 as a response to a detected condition associated with any of the methods or control routines such as those described above.

An exemplary Valve Stem Interrupt Routine is illustrated in FIG. 18 as method 600. The method 600 detects the location of the valve stem and reacts to it. In method 600, the tactile feedback for sensed tire rotation is continually sent to the controller 152 at step 602. The controller 152 determines at step 604 if the rotational location of the mounted tire's valve stem is such that a tool is near the valve stem. If the valve stem of the mounted tire is near a tool and getting closer, the tire rotation is reversed by the controller at step 606.

An alternative Valve Stem Interrupt Routine would be to use the tactile feedback and have the controller 152 remove some, but not all, of the forces on the tool as the valve stem location is rotated past the tool. It is important not to apply too much force in the area of a valve stem because of the high probability of the valve stem to have a tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS) sensor which could be damaged in the event that too much force is applied.

An exemplary method 620 for verifying that the tire bead has been unseated from the rim bead seat is shown in FIG. 19. It is assumed that the controller 152 of machine 100 has determined that the tire bead has been unseated at a rotational location of the mounted wheel rim and a force on the tool has been reduced from its maximum value. The speed of rotation of the mounted tire can be increased as step 622 to a speed within a limit 624 as a result of the reduction in a force of the tool. The current direction of rotation continues until the valve stem moves to within proximity of the tool 626. The tire

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rotation is then reversed 628 until the valve stem again moves to within proximity of the tool 630. The forces on the tool can then be decreased and control of the tool released in steps 632, 634, 636, 638 and 640. Instructions are then displayed to the operator at step 642 on the optional display 124.

FIG. 20 illustrates a method flowchart of exemplary processes 700 utilized in the machine 100 (FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c) to change tires 108. FIG. 20 is provided as a non-limiting example of various processes that can be implemented with and executed by the controller 152 in the control systems shown in FIGS. 2-9.

The processes 700 facilitate automated sensing of wheel assembly features, including but not limited to tire dimensions and locations of features such as tire beads that may serve as inputs for tire mount or demount procedures, including but not necessarily limited to those described above.

As shown in FIG. 20, the process 700 includes at step 702 accepting an initial position of at least one component of the machine 100. In one contemplated embodiment, a human operator of the machine may manually position the component to a desired initial position, and then input the position to the controller. For example, the machine operator may position one of the machine tools near to, but spaced from, the tire sidewall, the tire tread, the wheel rim edge close to the tire bead, or another feature of interest. The operator may then enter the initial position as a starting position for the steps described below. Optionally, once accepted, an operator defined initial position may be stored in the controller memory for future recall and use.

Alternatively, as shown at step 704, the controller may automatically move one or more desired components to a predetermined initial position stored in the controller memory. The predetermined initial position may be a previously accepted initial position saved in the controller memory, or a default value programmed into the machine that the machine operator cannot change. The controller may retrieve the initial position from memory and automatically undertake operation of the appropriate actuators to move the components to the initial position. For example, the bead breaker tools 116a, 116b described above may be positioned by their respective actuators along vertical and/or horizontal axes of movement to the initial positions.

In certain embodiments, the machine may be configured for automatic operation, manual operation, or a combination of automatic and manual operation. Thus, in some embodiments, a choice between manual position of the machine components at step 702 and automatic positioning of the machine components at step 704 may be provided to the user for selection. In other embodiments one or the other of the options shown in steps 702 and 704 may be provided.

At step 706, the controller moves at least one of the components from the initial position in a direction toward the feature of interest, such as the tire in this example. Thus, if the upper tire sidewall is the feature of interest, the initial position may place one of the machine tools above the upper sidewall of the tire, and at step 706 the controller moves the machine tool in a downward direction toward the side wall. As another example, if the tire tread is the feature of interest, the initial position may place one of the machine tools radially alongside the tire, and the controller may move the machine tool at step 706 in a radial direction toward the tire. In these examples, the pressing tool operated at step 706 may be one of the upper and lower bead breaker tools 116a, 116b, although other of the tools provided on the machine may similarly be utilized. Still further, non-tool components may

be utilized for the purposes of the processes 700 described. More than one component may be moved at the same time for the purposes of step 706.

At step 708, the controller monitors the first position sensor associated with each component being moved. At step 710, the controller monitors the first force sensor for each component being moved. As such, the controller is provided with both force and position feedback for each of the components being moved. In the example of a pressing tool such as the bead breaker tools 116a or 116b, the controller is provided with position and force feedback information via the respective force and position sensors associated with each of the bead breaker tools 116a or 116b.

At step 712, the controller monitors the tactile force feedback signal and determines whether a contact force exists. For example, in the case of a pressing tool such as the bead breaker 116a, contact force is detected when the tactile force feedback signal changes from a constant, substantially zero value to a positive value. By monitoring the rate of change of the feedback signal as discussed above, both an existence of force and an actual amount or magnitude of force at any given time can be detected. For purposes of step 712, the amount of detected force may be compared to a predetermined limit if desired to eliminate possible false force detections.

If force is not detected at step 712, the controller continues to operate the actuator(s) at step 706. If force is detected at step 712, the actuator(s) are stopped at step 714 and the position where the contact force is established is recorded in the controller memory as shown at step 716. The controller can correlate this position with a feature of the tire or wheel rim for purposes of a tire change procedure. Optionally after recording the position at step 716, the controller may return to step 702 and 704 to accept or assume another initial position for desired components. Thus, steps 702 through 716 may be repeated to assess different features of the tire and wheel rim assembly. For instance, steps 702 through 716 may be run once with a pressing tool to locate a location of the tire side wall, and steps 702 through 716 may be run a second time with the same or different pressing tool to locate the edges of the wheel rim. Of course, it is possible to locate such features simultaneously using different tools or components of the machine. For example, the upper bead breaker could be utilized to locate the tire side wall while the lower bead breaker is simultaneously utilized to locate the tire tread (and hence reveal the tire diameter).

Sensed and detected dimensional and location information may optionally be provided to the user via screen displays and the like, and interactive screen displays and the like may be provided to prompt the user through the detection processes illustrated. Also optionally, screen displays and the like may be provided for the machine operator to select manual or automatic operation of the machine, select components to be used for the processes 700, and select available change tire procedures based on detected information.

As illustrated in FIG. 20, the processes 700 further allow tire and wheel rim features to be deduced or determined from different recorded positions. For example, steps 706 through 716 could be run to locate a position of the upper sidewall of the tire via steps 718 through 728, which can be seen as corresponding steps to those shown as steps 706 through 716 but using different actuators and components. In one contemplated embodiment, steps 706 through 716 may be run with the upper bead breaker tool 116a to locate and record the position of the upper sidewall of the tire, and steps 718 through 728 may be run thereafter with the lower bead breaker tool 116 to locate and record the position of the lower sidewall of the tire. Once these two positions are recorded, the

controller can easily determine the width of the tire by calculating the difference between the two recorded positions in the width direction.

After the desired dimensional and locational information is obtained and recorded, a tire change procedure may be performed using the recorded information as shown at step 732. The tire change procedures may include the procedures described above or other procedures. Moreover, the tire change procedures performed need not necessarily require further force feedback controls to execute the tire change procedures. Thus, in certain embodiments, the force feedback controls may be provided predominately, if not entirely, for tire and wheel rim measurement purposes rather than for controlling the application of force during tire mounting or demounting procedures.

The exemplary steps shown and described in FIG. 20 may be effectively utilized to provide automatic detection capabilities to the machine for wheel rim and tire features. Thus, the machine operators need not concern themselves with providing pertinent wheel rim and tire information to the machine, and the machine need not maintain or access a database of such information to perform tire change procedures. In general, the machine may be made more user friendly and in some aspects, less costly, utilizing the exemplary processes 700.

FIG. 21 is a block diagram of a ninth exemplary control system 750 for the machine 100 shown in FIG. 1. Like the exemplary control systems shown in FIGS. 2-9, the control system 750 includes the controller 152, the indicator 168, the display 124, and the alarm 166 as described above. The controller 152 is interfaced with an actuator element 752 that may correspond to any of the rotary or linear actuators described above and included on the machine 100, as well as the pump motor that supplies pressurized fluid in hydraulic or pneumatically powered machines.

In the system 750, an actuator sensor 754, which may be any of the sensor types described above or otherwise known in the art, provides a feedback control signal to the controller 152 regarding operation of the actuator element 752. The actuator element 752 generates an applied force that drives, displaces, or moves a component 756 of the machine 100, including but not limited to the machine tools described above and related support arms and mechanical linkages provided on the machine. The applied force may be monitored via the actuator sensor 754, and a component sensor 758 provides a feedback control signal to the controller 152 regarding actual physical movement or displacement of the actuated component 756. While one actuator element 752 and one component 756 are shown in FIG. 21, each actuator drive element and each driven component in the machine 100 may be provided with corresponding actuator sensors 754 and component sensors 758.

The arrangement shown in FIG. 21 therefore facilitates a real time analysis of operating force conditions of the drive element (i.e., the actuator element 752) with the operating position of the driven element (i.e., the component 756). The controller 152, via the actuator sensor 754, indirectly monitors force applied by the component 756 by sensing an amount of power applied by the actuator element 752 to move the component 756. The controller 152 can accordingly intelligently assess the state of a procedure being executed in a manner that has not conventionally been possible. In various contemplated embodiments, the actuator sensor 754 may sense a voltage of the actuator element 752, a current drawn by the actuator element 752 or a pressure associated with the actuator element 752, each of which indicates a load on the actuator element 752 corresponding to the applied force of

the component 756 as the procedure is being executed. In general, once the load on the actuator element 752 is known, the amount of force being applied by the component 756 can be deduced.

In one contemplated control scheme, such sensed voltage, current or pressure readings for the actuator sensor element 752 by virtue of the actuator sensor 754 may be compared by the controller 152 to expected values of force as the component 756 is moved to different positions as detected with the component sensor 758. As used herein, and as illustrated in the following examples "expected values" of force may include an absence of force, a presence of force, regardless of the magnitude of the force presented, or a specific magnitude of force presented. At any given position of the component 756, an expected value of force may be compared with the force indicated by the actuator sensor element 754 at the given position. This comparison may be made in reference to force and position profiles such as those described above.

For example, if at a given position of the component 756 (as made known to the controller by the sensor 758) no load is detected on the actuator element 752 (i.e., no change in voltage, current, or pressure is detected and no force is applied by the component 756), the controller 152 checks to see whether the component 756 at that position is expected to apply no force. Conversely, if at a given position of the component 756 a load is detected on the actuator element 752 (i.e., a change in voltage, current, or pressure is detected and a force is being applied by the component 756), the controller 152 checks to see whether the component 756 at that position is expected to apply a corresponding amount of force. The controller 152, based on the comparison of feedback signals from the sensors 754 and 758, can determine if the procedure being executed exhibits normal or abnormal conditions. If expected force and detected force correspond, the tire change procedure is operating normally. If, however, expected force is not detected, or if detected force is unexpected, the tire change procedure being executed is operating abnormally.

In another contemplated control scheme, sensed voltage, current or pressure readings by the actuator sensor element 754 may be utilized by the controller 152 to detect a position of the component 756 (as made known to the controller by the sensor 758) when force is being applied. That is, the controller 152 looks for a change in voltage, current, or pressure of the actuator element 752 that correspond to a force being applied by the component 756 and then notes the position of the component 756 where the change is occurring. The position of the component 756 and corresponding force is then compared to expected values of force at that position. Such comparison may be made in reference to force and position profiles described above. The controller 152, based on the comparison, can determine if the tire change procedure being executed exhibits normal or abnormal conditions.

In either of the control schemes described above, the actuator sensor 754 provides a feedback signal to the controller 152 regarding the state of the actuator element 752 providing a drive force, which may be used with the positional state of the driven component 756 to allow for enhanced control and error detection relating to the operation of the sensors 754, 758 and/or mechanical errors or issues relating to the driving or driven components 752, 756. In particular, the actuator sensor 754 may be utilized to monitor a load on the actuator 752 while the component 756 is positioned, while the component sensor 758 may be utilized to monitor positional displacement of the component 756 when being driven by the actuator 752. As such, the controller 152 can compare monitored signals from the sensors 754, 758 and compare them with expected load and force conditions of the actuator element

and/or with expected displacement of the driven component 756 at any particular point in a tire change procedure. As a result, the controller 152 is capable of determining error conditions that the controller 152 would otherwise not be able to detect. In other words, the controller 152 may determine, based upon the monitored signals from the sensors 754, 758 whether the machine is operating normally or abnormally as further explained below with illustrative examples.

FIG. 22 is a method flowchart of an exemplary process 800 of operating the machine 100 having the control system 750. At step 802, the controller 152 starts to execute a tire change procedure, including but not limited to any of the procedures described above. Accordingly, at step 804 the controller 152 operates the actuator element 752 to undertake a corresponding positioning of the component 756 to perform a step in the tire change procedure. At step 806, the controller 152 monitors the feedback signal provided by the actuator sensor 754, and at step 808 the controller 152 monitors the feedback signal provided by the component sensor 758. At step 810, the feedback signals monitored at steps 806 and 808 are then compared by the controller 152 using, for example, one of the control schemes described above. The controller 152, based on the signal comparison, can determine at step 811 whether an operating error condition exists based on conflicts or discrepancies in the compared signals. If such error conditions are detected at step 811, the controller 152 may cease operation of the actuator at step 812 (as well as suspend operation of other machine elements). Optionally, the controller 152 may also set an alarm condition at step 814 and display information to the operator at step 816.

Several exemplary scenarios of error determination for the purposes of step 811 will now be discussed to illustrate the concept further.

In one contemplated scenario, the driven component 756 may be a support arm for one of the machine tools 114, 116, 117 described above, and the actuator element 752 drives the support arm toward and away from the drive axis 112 (FIG. 1) of the machine 100. The component sensor 758 may be a potentiometer in one contemplated embodiment, and the potentiometer monitors the displacement of the support arm via a rack and pinion arrangement and provides a feedback control signal to the controller 152 indicating the position of the support arm. The indication of position may be made relative to a predetermined home position wherein the distal end of the support arm is retracted at a first distance away from machine drive axis 112, a fully extended position wherein the distal end of the support arm is at a second distance that is closer to the machine drive axis 112, and any intermediate position between the retracted home position and the fully extended position. The construction and operation of such a potentiometer is well known and hence not further described, except to note that as those in the art would appreciate, the potentiometer may provide a variable electrical voltage signal or a variable electrical current signal, either of which may vary with the position of the support arm as it is moved between the home position and the fully extended position. The controller 152 may determine the physical position of the support arm based on the magnitude of the voltage or current feedback signal from the potentiometer.

Continuing with the support arm component and the potentiometer support arm sensor example, it is possible that the potentiometer support arm sensor 758 may provide a feedback signal that falsely indicates the position of the support arm to the controller 152. For example, if for whatever reason the pinion gear attached to the potentiometer becomes disengaged from the rack gear attached to the support arm, the support arm component 756 may physically move while the

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potentiometer feedback signal from the potentiometer support arm sensor 758 to the controller 152 remains constant. The unchanging feedback signal from the sensor 758 to the controller 152 in this situation would apparently indicate to the controller 152 that the support arm component 756 is stationary, while the support arm component 756 is in fact moving. That is, because of a temporary error in the mechanical arrangement of the potentiometer sensor 758, the support arm component 754 may move without the controller 152 being able to detect it. In this scenario, there is no absolute position check provided in the system and when, for example, the support arm component 756 is sent to its home position, the potentiometer sensor 758 may indicate that the support arm component 756 is "home" when the support arm is, in fact, not in the home position. As all operation of the actuator element 752 to move the support arm component 756 by the controller 152 is referenced to the home position, such false position detection can lead to cascading errors throughout the machine's attempt to execute the desired tire change procedure.

Such false home position detection problems are solved, however, by providing the actuator sensor 754. The actuator element 752, which may be a motor in one example, will experience an abrupt increase in force or load when the support arm component 756 reaches a hard stop in the home position. In the case of an electrical actuator element 752, electrical current flow to the actuator element 752 may be sensed with a current sensor 754 and the controller 152 may detect the hard stop at the home position via a sudden increase, or spike, in the monitored current corresponding to an increased load on the actuator element 752. In the case of a pneumatic or hydraulic actuator element 752, pressure of the operating fluid to the actuator element 752 may be sensed and the controller 152 may detect the hard stop at the home position via a sudden increase, or spike, in the monitored pressure corresponding to an increased load on the actuator element 752. Also, in a hydraulic or pneumatic system, the electric load on an electric motor element 752 of the pump supplying the pressurized fluid, which may be sensed with an electrical current sensor, will also indicate a pressure change and may be used to detect a hard stop of the support arm component 756 in a similar manner.

However it is made, the force reading from the actuator sensor 754 can be analyzed along with the reading from the potentiometer sensor 758, and in this example if the potentiometer sensor signal indicates the home position of the support arm component 756 has been reached but the actuator sensor 754 does not indicate the change in force or load that would correspond to the support arm component 756 reaching the home position, a positional error state can be determined. When this happens, there is reason to doubt that the support arm component 756 is actually in the home position. Appropriate alarms and instructions may therefore be generated by the controller 152 and provided to the machine operator at steps 814 and 816 so that the operator may inspect and take appropriate action before continuing machine operation.

As another example of error state detection that may be performed at step 811, the controller 152 may monitor the actuator force sensor 754 when operating to move the support arm component 756 from its home position or another position that is free of obstruction, and while this is happening check the potentiometer sensor 758 to see if the support arm component 156 moves as expected.

For example, in the case of a pneumatic or hydraulic actuator element 752, when the pressure valves are operated to supply pressurized fluid to the actuator element 752, corresponding movement of the driven component 756 would be

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the expected result. Likewise, for an electric actuator element 752, when current is drawn by the electric actuator element 752 movement of the driven component 756 should be expected. In either case, when the actuator element 752 is operating, but there is little or no movement detected by the component sensor 758, an error state might be deduced. In the support arm component and potentiometer sensor example described above, this result might indicate that the potentiometer sensor is slipping or otherwise not working properly. This result may also indicate that the support arm component 756 is hitting some unexpected resistance. Thus, the controller 152 can watch for times when the component 756 should not be near an obstruction, but yet the sensors 754 and 758 indicate an increasing actuator load without corresponding movement. When this happens, the component 756 may be in contact with a tire or wheel, or perhaps in contact with one of the home or fully extended physical stops. Regardless, when such events occur unexpectedly the controller 152 can determine that an error condition exists, and may request inspection or provide instructions to the machine operator to take corrective action.

As still another example of error determination for the purposes of step 811, the actuator element 752 may operate to tilt the drive spindle (i.e., the drive assembly 104 in FIG. 1) to one or more positions at different angles relating to the machine base 102 (FIG. 1), and as such may change the orientation of the machine drive axis 112 between a fully vertical position and one or more tilted positions. The component sensor 758 may accordingly be a tilt sensor providing feedback to the controller that varies with the angular position of the drive axis 112. By comparing the actuator sensor signal and the tilt sensor signals via the sensors 754 and 758 various error conditions may be detected. As the spindle is actuated to the fully vertical position it will hit a hard stop and the actuator will see a sudden increase or spike in the load that can also be seen with actuator sensor 754. Therefore, the actuator sensor 754, in combination with the tilt sensor 758 can confirm that the fully vertical position has been reached or indicate an error in the tilt sensor signal if that indicates otherwise. Likewise, the tilt sensor 758 might indicate that the spindle is stationary while the actuator sensor 754 indicates that it should be in motion, thus presenting ambiguity to the controller 152 that may trigger an error. The tilt sensor 758 may also indicate that the spindle is not fully up or down (i.e., not near a physical stop) while the actuator load is unexpectedly high, possibly indicating an obstruction or a malfunctioning sensor.

As another, example, the actuator element 752 may operate to adjust a position of the drive spindle component 756 (i.e., the drive assembly 104 in FIG. 1) to different operating positions orienting the drive axis 112 at different locations relative to the machine tools. That is, the spindle component 756 may be positionable horizontally to different positions forward and backward relative to the machine base 102 in the example of FIG. 1, while still keeping the drive axis 112 vertical and operable in different positions to complete a tire change procedure. The spindle component sensor 758 may accordingly be a position sensor providing feedback to the controller that varies with the position of the spindle component 756. By comparing the actuator sensor signal and the spindle position signals via the sensors 754 and 758 error conditions may be detected. As the spindle component 756 is actuated fully forward or backward, for example, it will hit a hard stop and the spindle actuator element 752 will see a sudden increase or spike in the load that can also be seen with actuator sensor 754. Therefore, the actuator sensor 754, in combination with the spindle position sensor 758 can confirm that the fully

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forward or fully backward position has been reached or indicate an error if the spindle position sensor 758 indicates otherwise. The spindle position sensor 758 might indicate that the spindle component 756 is stationary while the actuator sensor 754 indicates that it should be in motion, thus presenting ambiguity to the controller 152 that may trigger an error. The spindle position sensor 758 may also indicate that the spindle is not fully forward or backward (i.e., not near a physical stop) while the spindle actuator load is unexpectedly high, possibly indicating an obstruction or a malfunctioning sensor.

As another example of error determination for the purposes of step 811, the actuator element 752 may drive the spindle of the machine and the component sensor 756 may be an encoder monitoring rotation of the spindle about the drive axis 112. When the spindle rotation encoder 758 indicates that the spindle component 756 is stationary when it should be in motion, or versa, an error condition is presented. Likewise, an unexpectedly high actuator load (e.g., pressure or motor current greater than a predetermined threshold) while trying to rotate the spindle component 756 may indicate a misapplication or error condition of one of the machine tools. On this note, and for tools that are movable relative to a support arm on the machine, pressure or current signals associated with the tools can be monitored to determine when the tools have reached a hard stop or have unexpectedly encountered an obstruction in an error state.

For the purposes of step 811, the controller 152 may determine that no error exists when there are no discrepancies in the monitored signals at steps 806 and 808. For example, when both sensors 754 and 758 indicate a hard stop has been reached with both force and position feedback, the signals are consistent and there is no apparent error. Likewise, when the actuator element 752 is under load and the position sensor indicates expected movement of the driven component 756, the signals are consistent and there is no error.

As also shown in FIG. 21, even in the absence of an error condition, the controller 152 may adjust or modify automatic speed control algorithms for one or more components, based on motor current or pressure signal feedback, for example, from the actuator sensor 754. The controller 152 is provided with desired speeds for one or more motions of components per the software executed by the controller 152, and the controller 152 may compute a duty cycle for one or more proportional valves, for example, to achieve the desired speed. Motor current and/or pump pressure provided by the actuator sensor 754 can be used, however, to adjust the duty cycle as shown at step 818.

It is sometimes desirable to move a component such as a support arm (or perhaps even the drive spindle) as fast as possible, but at certain duty cycles achieving high speeds might result in sufficiently high pressures to cause one or more relief valves to open, causing noise and wasting fluid flow. As the pressure approaches the threshold level for the relief valve(s) to operate, the duty cycle may be decreased and hence lower the target speed to achieve the highest speed possible without opening of the pressure relieve valve(s).

Also, when multiple motions of driven components occur at the same time during a tire change procedure, each actuator element 752 driving each component 756 shares the total system fluid flow and pressure. Step 811 may accordingly adjust the speed of the actuator elements causing the movements, both individually and collectively, to achieve optimal speed of the motions without exceeding the relief valve pressure.

FIG. 23 is a block diagram of a tenth exemplary control system 900 for the machine 100 shown in FIG. 1. Like the

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exemplary control systems shown in FIGS. 2-9 and 21, the control system 900 includes the controller 152, the indicator 168, the display 124, and the alarm 166 as described above. The controller 152 is interfaced with an actuator such as a pump motor 902 that supplies pressurized fluid for the various actuators provided on the machine 100. A pump sensor 904 is also provided and provides a feedback control signal to the controller 152 regarding operation of the pump. In different embodiments, the pump sensor 904 may be an electrical current sensor or a pressure sensor. An emergency stop element 906 is also provided for the benefit of the operator, and a sensor 908 is associated with the emergency stop element 906 and provides a feedback signal to the controller 152 regarding the state of the emergency stop element 906. The emergency stop element 906 may be any input selector known in the art or otherwise provided for use by the operator to immediately suspend or shut down machine operation. The emergency stop element 906 may provide convenient and safe shutdown of the machine at any time desired by the operator. The emergency stop sensor 908, in combination with the pump sensor 904, provides for intelligence to the controller 152 that can avoid certain problems as explained below. In particular, the emergency stop element 906 can at times result in confusion to the operator and error to the machine 100.

FIG. 24 is a method flowchart of an exemplary process 920 of operating the machine 100. The algorithm 920 begins at machine startup, and at step 922 the machine enters a soft start delay. The soft start delay is made in recognition that motor inrush currents for the pump motor 902 are experienced for a short time when the pump motor is first energized. Thus, the soft start delay waits until inrush currents have subsided before doing anything else with the machine 100. The soft start delay may be a simple time-based delay, or may involve electrical current sensing to determine when inrush currents are no longer present. The soft start delay decreases the chance of motor inrush currents will add to other machine power requirements to draw excess current that will activate circuit protectors such as circuit breakers, cause protective relays to operate, or cause fuses to open.

After the soft start delay of step 902, the controller 152 monitors the emergency sensor 908 at step 924 so that the controller may determine the state of the emergency stop element as on or off. At step 926, if the emergency stop element is determined to be on, the operator may be notified at step 928 to turn it off. This feature can be particularly beneficial when the emergency stop element has been inadvertently activated while the machine was off, or when unbeknownst to the operator a prior operator had turned the emergency stop on.

If at step 926 the emergency stop element is determined to be off, the controller 152 may enable the pump at step 930 and pressurize the working fluid. The pump sensor 904 is then monitored at step 932, and at step 934 the controller checks the pump pressure (or motor load) to determine if the pump is operating in a normal manner. If the pump is operating normally, at step 936 the controller 152 may execute any tire change procedure selected by the operator by moving the various necessary components with the necessary actuators to complete the tire change procedure. The tire change procedure at step 936 may include the error correction features discussed above in relation to FIG. 22.

While the tire change procedure is executed at step 936, the controller 152 monitors the emergency stop sensor at step 938. If the emergency stop element is determined to be on or activated at step 940, the controller 960 may disable the pump at step 960, set an alarm at step 962, display instructions to an

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operator at step 964, and optionally enter a diagnostics mode at step 966. As shown in FIG. 24, the steps 960, 962, 964 and 966 may also result from the pump being found to operate abnormally at step 934.

If the controller determines that the emergency stop has not been activated at step 940, the controller may continue to complete the tire change procedure at step 942. At step 944, the controller compares the signals from the pump sensor and the emergency stop sensor and looks for anomalies, discrepancies, or conflicting signals at step 946. For example, if the emergency stop element is off and the pump pressure unexpectedly falls or goes to zero as the tire changer machine operates this indicates a problem with the pump system. As another example, if the emergency stop sensor indicates that the emergency stop element has been activated but the pump pressure or motor current remains at normal operating levels, this indicates a problem with the emergency stop sensor 908. Accordingly, the controller 152 can set an alarm at step 948, enter a diagnostic mode at step 950 and/or display instructions to the operator at step 952. In the diagnostics mode at step 952 (and also at step 966) the controller 152 can attempt to identify problematic components such as motor relays, circuit breakers, malfunctioning sensors, or a problem with the motor itself and identify specific problems to the operator for correction.

Having now described the control systems and exemplary algorithms, routines and processes in relation to FIGS. 1-24, it is believed that those of ordinary skill in the art could program the controllers to perform corresponding algorithms without further explanation to provide the functionality described. It is understood that aspects of the control systems and processes described in FIGS. 1-24 may be combined to provide further variations of machines having the described features in combination.

It is now believed that the benefits of the invention have been amply illustrated by the exemplary embodiments disclosed.

An embodiment of a tire changer machine for changing a tire on a wheel rim has been disclosed. The tire changer machine includes: a drive assembly configured to rotate a wheel rim and associated tire about a rotational axis; at least one component configured to engage one of the tire and wheel rim in a tire change procedure; and a control system. The control system includes: at least one actuator configured to move said at least one component; a first sensor configured to provide a first signal indicative of an amount of force applied to the tire or wheel rim by the at least one component; a second sensor configured to provide a second signal indicative of the position of said at least one component; and a controller configured to: operate said at least one actuator to move said at least one component toward a first portion of one of the tire and wheel rim; monitor the first sensor to detect a contact force when the at least one component contacts the first portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim; monitor the second sensor to detect a first position of the at least one component where the contact with the first portion was made; and record the first position.

Optionally, the controller is further configured to: operate said at least one actuator to move said at least one component toward a second portion of one of the tire and wheel rim; monitor the first sensor to detect a contact force when the at least one component contacts the second portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim; monitor the second sensor to detect a second position of the at least one component where the contact with the second portion was made; and record the second position. The first and second positions may define the tire width.

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The tire may include opposing first and second sidewalls and the at least one component comprises a first tool. The at least one actuator may include a first actuator for moving the first tool into contact with the first sidewall; and the controller may be configured to: operate said first actuator to move said first tool toward the first sidewall; monitor the first sensor to detect a contact force when the first tool contacts the first sidewall; monitor the second sensor to detect a first position of the first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made; and record the first position of the first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made. The first tool may include a bead breaker tool.

The at least one component may also include a second tool, and the at least one actuator may include a second actuator for moving the second tool into contact with the second sidewall. The controller may be configured to: operate said second actuator to move said second tool toward the second sidewall; monitor the first sensor to detect a contact force when the second tool contacts the second sidewall; monitor the second sensor to detect a position of the second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made; and record a second position of the second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made. The second tool may include a bead breaker tool, and the first and second positions may define a width of the tire.

An exemplary method of changing a tire on a wheel rim has also been disclosed. The method is implemented on a tire changer machine having a drive assembly configured to rotate a wheel rim and associated tire about a rotational axis, at least one component configured to engage one of the tire or rim in a tire change procedure, and a control system. The control system includes at least one actuator configured to move said at least one component, a first sensor configured to provide a first signal indicative of an amount of force applied to the tire or rim by the at least one component, a second sensor configured to provide a second signal indicative of the position of said at least one component, and a controller. The method includes: operating the at least one actuator, with the controller, to move the at least one component toward a first portion of one of the tire and wheel rim; monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the at least one component contacts the first portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim; monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a first position of the at least one component where the contact with the first portion was made; and recording the first position.

Optionally, the method may further include: operating the at least one actuator, with the controller, to move the at least one component toward a second portion of one of the tire and wheel rim; monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the at least one component contacts the second portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim; monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a second position of the at least one component where the contact with the second portion was made; and recording the second position. The method may include determining the tire width from recorded first and second positions.

The tire may include opposing first and second sidewalls, the at least one component may be a first tool, and the at least one actuator may be a first actuator for moving the first tool into contact with the first sidewall. The method may also include: operating said first actuator, with the controller, to move the first tool toward the first sidewall; monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the first tool contacts the first sidewall; monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a first position of the first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made; and

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recording the first position of the first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made. The first tool may be a bead breaker tool.

The at least one component may include a second tool, the at least one actuator further including a second actuator for moving the second tool into contact with the second sidewall, and the method may include: operating said second actuator, with the controller, to move the second tool toward the second sidewall; monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the second tool contacts the second sidewall; monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a position of the second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made; and recording a second position of the second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made.

Optionally, the second tool may be a bead breaker tool. The method may also include determining a width of the tire from the first and second positions.

An embodiment of a tire changer machine for changing a tire on a wheel rim has also been disclosed. The tire changer machine includes: a drive assembly configured to rotate the wheel rim and tire about a rotational axis; and a control system. The control system includes: at least one actuator element; at least one movable component being driven by the actuator element; a first sensor configured to provide a first signal indicative of a load associated with the actuator element; a second sensor configured to provide a second signal indicative of the position of said at least one component; and a controller. The controller is configured to: operate said at least one actuator element to move said at least one component to a predetermined position to perform a step of the tire change procedure; monitor the first and second signals while the at least one actuator is being operated; and evaluate the first monitored signal in relation to the second monitored signal to determine if the machine is operating within normal parameters.

Optionally, the actuator may include one of a rotary actuator, a linear actuator, and an electrical pump motor. The first sensor may include one of an electrical voltage sensor, an electrical current sensor, and a pressure sensor. The second sensor may include one of a potentiometer, a tilt sensor, and an encoder. The controller may be configured to determine, based on the evaluation of the first monitored signal and the second monitored signal, whether or not the component has reached a hard stop. The controller may also be configured to determine whether or not the component has reached a home position. The controller may be configured to determine an error condition based on the evaluation of the first monitored signal and second monitored signal. The error condition may correspond to a positioning error of the component, or to a malfunctioning sensor.

The controller may also be configured to adjust an automatic speed of the movable component when the machine is operating normally. The controller may be configured to adjust a duty cycle of a pressure valve to adjust the automatic speed.

This written description uses examples to disclose the invention, including the best mode, and also to enable any person skilled in the art to practice the invention, including making and using any devices or systems and performing any incorporated methods. The patentable scope of the invention is defined by the claims, and may include other examples that occur to those skilled in the art. Such other examples are intended to be within the scope of the claims if they have structural elements that do not differ from the literal language

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of the claims, or if they include equivalent structural elements with insubstantial differences from the literal languages of the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A tire changer machine for changing a tire on a wheel rim, comprising:

a drive assembly configured to rotate a wheel rim and associated tire about a rotational axis;

at least one component configured to engage one of the tire and wheel rim in a tire change procedure; and

a control system comprising:

at least one actuator configured to move said at least one component;

a first sensor configured to provide a first signal indicative of an amount of force applied to the tire or wheel rim by said at least one component;

a second sensor configured to provide a second signal indicative of the position of said at least one component; and

a controller configured to:

operate said at least one actuator to move said at least one component toward a first portion of one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitor said first sensor to detect a contact force when said at least one component contacts the first portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitor said second sensor to detect a first position of said at least one component where the contact with the first portion was made; and

record the first position.

2. The tire changer machine of claim 1, wherein said controller is further configured to:

operate said at least one actuator to move said at least one component toward a second portion of one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitor said first sensor to detect a contact force when said at least one component contacts said second portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitor said second sensor to detect a second position of said at least one component where said contact with said second portion was made; and

record the second position.

3. The tire changer machine of claim 2, wherein said first and second positions define a width of the tire.

4. The tire changer machine of claim 1, the tire including opposing first and second sidewalls;

wherein said at least one component comprises a first tool;

wherein said at least one actuator further comprises a first actuator for moving the first tool into contact with the first sidewall; and

wherein said controller is further configured to:

operate said first actuator to move said first tool toward the first sidewall;

monitor said first sensor to detect a contact force when said first tool contacts the first sidewall;

monitor said second sensor to detect a first position of said first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made; and

record said first position of said first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made.

5. The tire changer machine of claim 4, wherein said first tool comprises a bead breaker tool.

6. The tire changer machine of claim 4;

wherein said at least one component comprises a second tool;

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wherein said at least one actuator further comprises a second actuator for moving said second tool into contact with the second sidewall; and

wherein said controller is further configured to:

operate said second actuator to move said second tool toward the second sidewall;

monitor said first sensor to detect a contact force when said second tool contacts the second sidewall;

monitor said second sensor to detect a position of said second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made; and

record a second position of said second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made.

7. The tire changer machine of claim 6, wherein said second tool comprises a bead breaker tool.

8. The tire changer machine of claim 7, wherein said first and second positions define a width of the tire.

9. A method of changing a tire on a wheel rim, the method implemented on a tire changer machine having a drive assembly configured to rotate a wheel rim and associated tire about a rotational axis, at least one component configured to engage one of the tire or rim in a tire change procedure, and a control system including at least one actuator configured to move the at least one component, a first sensor configured to provide a first signal indicative of an amount of force applied to the tire or rim by the at least one component, a second sensor configured to provide a second signal indicative of the position of the at least one component, and a controller; wherein the method comprises:

operating the at least one actuator, with the controller, to move the at least one component toward a first portion of one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the at least one component contacts the first portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a first position of the at least one component where the contact with the first portion was made; and

recording the first position.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

operating the at least one actuator, with the controller, to move the at least one component toward a second portion of one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the at least one component contacts the second portion of at least one of the tire and wheel rim;

monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a second position of the at least one component where the contact with the second portion was made; and

recording the second position.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising determining a tire width of the tire from the recorded first and second positions.

12. The method of claim 9, the tire including opposing first and second sidewalls, the at least one component being a first tool, the at least one actuator being a first actuator for moving the first tool into contact with the first sidewall and the method further comprising:

operating the first actuator, with the controller, to move the first tool toward the first sidewall;

monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the first tool contacts the first sidewall;

monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a first position of the first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made; and

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recording the first position of the first tool where the contact with the first sidewall was made.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the first tool is a bead breaker tool.

14. The method of claim 12, the at least one component including a second tool, the at least one actuator further including a second actuator for moving the second tool into contact with the second sidewall, the method comprising:

operating the second actuator, with the controller, to move the second tool toward the second sidewall;

monitoring the first sensor, with the controller, to detect a contact force when the second tool contacts the second sidewall;

monitoring the second sensor, with the controller, to detect a position of the second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made; and

recording a second position of the second tool where the contact with the second sidewall was made.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the second tool is a bead breaker tool.

16. The method of claim 14, further comprising determining a width of the tire from the first and second positions.

17. A tire changer machine for changing a tire on a wheel rim, comprising:

a drive assembly configured to rotate the wheel rim and tire about a rotational axis; and

a control system comprising:

at least one actuator element;

at least one movable component being driven by the actuator element;

a first sensor configured to provide a first signal indicative of a load associated with the actuator element;

a second sensor configured to provide a second signal indicative of the position of said at least one movable component; and

a controller configured to:

operate said at least one actuator element to move said at least one movable component to a predetermined position to perform a step of a tire change procedure;

monitor the first and second signals while the at least one actuator is being operated; and

evaluate the first monitored signal in relation to the second monitored signal to determine if the machine is operating within normal parameters.

18. The tire changer machine of claim 17, wherein the at least one actuator element comprises one of a rotary actuator, a linear actuator, and an electrical pump motor.

19. The tire changer machine of claim 17, wherein the first sensor comprises one of an electrical voltage sensor, an electrical current sensor, and a pressure sensor.

20. The tire changer machine of claim 17, wherein the second sensor comprises one of a potentiometer, a tilt sensor, and an encoder.

21. The tire changer machine of claim 17, wherein the controller is further configured to determine, based on the evaluation of the first monitored signal and the second monitored signal, whether or not the at least one movable component has reached a hard stop.

22. The tire changer machine of claim 21, wherein the controller is further configured to determine whether or not the at least one movable component has reached a home position.

23. The tire changer machine of claim 17, wherein the controller is further configured to determine an error condition based on the evaluation of the first monitored signal and second monitored signal.

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24. The tire changer machine of claim 23, wherein the error condition corresponds to a positioning error of the at least one movable component.

25. The tire changer machine of claim 23, wherein the error condition corresponds to a malfunctioning sensor.

26. The tire changer machine of claim 17, wherein the controller is further configured to adjust an automatic speed of the at least one movable component when the machine is operating normally.

27. The tire changer machine of claim 26, wherein the controller is further configured to adjust a duty cycle of a pressure valve to adjust the automatic speed.

28. A tire changer machine for changing a tire on a wheel rim of a wheel assembly, the machine comprising:

a base;

a drive assembly coupled to the base and configured to rotate a wheel rim and associated tire about a rotational axis; and

a control system comprising:

at least one component configured to engage said wheel assembly;

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an actuator configured to move said at least one component;

at least one sensor providing a feedback signal related to an amount of force applied by the at least one component to said wheel assembly; and

a controller configured to:

operate at least one of said drive assembly and said actuator to effect a step of a tire change procedure;

monitor a relationship between the feedback signal and a predetermined threshold during the tire change procedure;

evaluate, based on the monitored relationship whether a rate of change of the feedback signal exceeds a predetermined rate of change threshold; and

alter an operation of either said actuator or said drive assembly, when the evaluated rate of change of the feedback signal exceeds the predetermined rate of change threshold during the step of the tire change procedure.

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